

THE GREAT DAYS OF NORTHUMBRIA

J. I. RAVIS MILLS



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THE GREAT DAYS OF NORTHUMBRIA



THE GREAT DAYS OF NORTHUMBRIA

THREE LECTURES

BY

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PREFACE

Two of the lectures here printed were delivered in an abridged form at the Annual Meeting of Cambridge University Extension students held at York in August of 1910. They are published in response to the repeated request of some who heard them. A third lecture has been added, that this general survey of a large subject may be somewhat less incomplete.

The aim of these lectures is a simple one:— to discuss, without pedantry, in terms intelligible to the plain man, and yet at the same time, so far as is permitted by their original plan and object, with strict regard to historic accuracy both in perspective and in detail, a period of our national story all too short indeed, but full of picturesqueness and romance, illustrated by many noble personalities, and productive of immense and lasting results. So far as the discovery of fresh facts is

concerned, I claim little credit for originality, though here and there, as in respect to the question of the site of Winwidfield, I have ventured to make definite suggestions which, to the best of my belief, are new.

My third lecture contains frequent extracts from Alcuin's letters. These quotations have for the most part been borrowed from the particular English translation which in each case appears to me most felicitous. But they have invariably been compared with the originals in Jaffé's *Bibliotheca Rerum Germanicarum*, volume vi. (in which the Epistles are edited by Duemmler). I am indebted in greater or less degree to every one of the books named in the short bibliography appended, and to many others not included in that list, in particular to Dr. Giles' complete edition of Bede's *Works* (Whitaker, 1843). It is a pleasure to acknowledge the great kindness of Dr. Thomas Hodgkin and of Mr. W. F. Reddaway, of King's College, Cambridge, who have read my mss. and assisted me with much valuable criticism and advice.

J. T. M.

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LECTURE I.

POLITICS: THREE GREAT NORTHUMBRIAN KINGS—EDWIN, OSWALD AND OSWY.

BEDE'S story of the Yorkshire slaves in the Forum. The political divisions of England at the close of the sixth century. The character and reign of Ethelfrid of Northumbria. Edwin, a refugee at the Court of East Anglia. National importance of the reigns of Edwin, Oswald and Oswy. The boundaries of Edwin's kingdom. His conquest of Elmet. His influence as Bretwalda. His good administration. The introduction of Christianity into Kent. Augustine and his mission. Tactless dealing with the Christian Britons. Why the Britons were unwilling to preach to the English. The partial failure of Augustine's mission. Edwin's marriage. Paulinus comes to Northumbria. The Witan discuss Christianity. King and people accept the new religion. Penda of Mercia and his aims, political and religious. Edwin defeated and slain at Hatfield by Penda and the Welsh. The contrast between Latin and Irish Christianity. Virtues of the Celtic Church. Columba at Iona. The conversion of England a result of the work not of the Roman but of the Celtic mission. Oswald's victory at Heavenfield. Aidan and the importance of his missionary labours. The piety of King Oswald. Lindisfarne and Bamburgh. Oswald as Bretwalda. Oswald slain at Maserfield. An estimate of his work. Succession of Oswy. Character of Penda. Events leading to the battle of Win-

widfield. Penda defeated and slain. Importance of Winwidfield; suggestion as to its site. Greatness of the three Northumbrian kings. Their services in the promotion of English unity.

AMONG the many famous stories related by Bede, few are more familiar than that which tells how the monk of St. Andrews monastery in Rome—the future Pope Gregory the Great—took that memorable walk through the Forum when he saw exposed for sale, among the other market-wares, some fair-haired Yorkshire boys.

“Of what nation are they?” inquired the monk. “They are English—Angles,” was the reply. Now Gregory possessed always the saving grace of humour—he was fond of puns. “They are rightly called ‘Angles,’” he said, “for they have angel faces. From what province were they taken?” “Deira,” the merchant answered. “Truly ‘de ira,’ withdrawn from wrath and called to Christ’s mercy. What is the name of their King?” “Ælle.” “Allelujah—those distant regions must echo to the praise of God.”¹

In the true understanding of this simple

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* ii. i.

incident, its causes and its results, is to be found the clue to much of the history of Saxon Northumbria.

At the close of the sixth century scarcely more than half the area of modern England had been wrested from the Britons. But south of Thames, the kingdoms of Kent and Wessex were already founded, so was the important State of East Anglia, which included the present counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, while beyond the Humber the great kingdom of Northumbria, under the sway of the able and vigorous Ethelfrid, stretched along the eastern coast as far as the Firth of Forth.

Ethelfrid united under his sceptre the twin kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira. It is usual to regard the river Tees as the boundary between the two States—so that Deira at the beginning of Ethelfrid's reign corresponded roughly to the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire; Bernicia to the counties of Durham and Northumberland and the S.E. corner of Scotland. We can speak with no certainty of the history of these two kingdoms before Ethelfrid's days;

we do not know by whom they were founded, or when the English keels first sailed up the Humber or the Tyne, but during the sixth century there seems to have been rivalry and war between King Ida, who reigned over Bernicia, and Ælle or Ella, King of Deira, and of this fact we may perhaps consider the presence of the Deiran slaves in the Forum as at once a confirmation and a result.

Reign of
Ethelfrid.
593-617

The Northern Kingdom was victorious, and Ethelfrid, son of Ida, succeeded to the double throne. He is a man of whom we should like to know more, though perhaps not at close quarters.

Bede tells us he was a "most worthy King," yet somewhat inconsistently he goes on to apply to him the patriarchal saying, "Benjamin shall raven as a wolf, in the morning he shall devour the prey and at night he shall divide the spoil."¹

Ethelfrid, without doubt, possessed unflagging energy; he was ambitious of glory, a most unsparing and merciless opponent, a great and victorious captain. He reduced

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* i. 34.

the Christian Scots to submission; then he 603
marched to the south-west, perhaps along
that very road whose grass-grown pavement
is still clearly visible on the bleak moor-
land of Blackstone Edge, and by his deci-
sive victory under the walls of Chester cut 613
off the Britons of Wales from their brethren
in the north, and added to Northumbria the
whole district between Nantwich and the
Ribble. There must surely have been a
more human side to the father of such
children as Oswald and Oswy and Ebba of
Coldingham, but we have no record of it.
Enterprise, ruthlessness, strength, by these
qualities only do we recognise Ethelfrid.

But, great leader as he was, he met defeat
and death in battle.

A moralist, discoursing on the mutability
of human affairs, would find illustrations
enough and to spare in the records of the
seventh century. It abounds with examples
of men who, like Hannibal before them or
Napoleon in a later age, after a lifetime of
victory, end their days amid disaster and
defeat. The Emperor Heraclius who, if he
had died at the age of sixty, would have

been regarded, and rightly, as one of the most consummate generals of all time, has many a counterpart on the smaller stage of our own island. Edwin, Oswald, Penda of Mercia, each fell on a lost field. So with Ethelfrid. Nemesis awaited him in the shape of a comparatively feeble and despised foe.

His young brother-in-law, Edwin, the son of Ella and heir to the throne of Deira, had been pursued from Court to Court by the jealousy of the Northumbrian king, and, at last, the hunted exile found a refuge with Redwald, King of East Anglia.¹

Ethelfrid's envoys offered bribes to Redwald if he would but surrender Edwin, and threatened war if he refused. Redwald wavered. The young prince was warned of his danger and besought to flee. "No," was his memorable and magnanimous answer, "I can't do what you suggest; I can't break my compact with so great a King, who has done me no wrong nor shown himself unfriendly. Rather let me die at *his* hand than by that of a meaner person." As he sat solitary, brood-

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* ii. 12.

ing over his misfortunes and the still harder blows which Fate seemed to have in store, suddenly—so runs the familiar story—there appeared out of the darkening night a stranger, who asked him why he was sitting thus melancholy and alone. “I know who you are,” the stranger said, “and why you grieve, and the evils which you fear. What would you give to a man who should deliver you from threatening harm and assure you of future greatness?” Edwin promised to do all that in him lay to reward so great a benefactor. “And what if he should give thee better counsel for life and soul than any which thy fathers have known? Would you then listen to his advice?”

The prince assented. The stranger placed his hand on the exile’s head—“When next thou shalt receive this sign, I shall claim the fulfilment of thy promise,” and with those words he vanished into the darkness whence he came. King Redwald, with that chivalry which, amidst much of cruelty and crime, was not infrequently displayed by the Teuton princes of his generation, refused to surrender his guest. He marched out to meet the

unsuspecting Ethelfrid, and, on the banks of the river Idle near Retford, gained a great
617 and decisive victory.

Ethelfrid himself was slain, and the Northumbrian sceptre was assumed by that king "whose name of Edwin," as a recent writer has said, "should not be uttered by any Englishman without grateful respect."

Students must not expect clear-cut and definite pictures of the personality and surroundings of these monarchs who form the subject of our lecture.

We are not dealing with modern history, but with medieval. Ancient authorities too often reveal to us only the vague and shadowy form. In seventh century England there was no Vandyke or Lely to depict on living canvas the features of her kings, no Boswell to jot down their talk, or St. Simon, with a courtier's eye, to note their changing moods and to preserve for posterity a record of the details of their daily lives. We do possess indeed the able and faithful guidance of Bede's great history, but Bede was primarily an ecclesiastical, and only secondarily a political historian.

In speaking of Edwin, Oswald and Oswy I shall attempt but little of consecutive narrative. Apart from the inspiring influence of noble personal example, their historic importance consists mainly in the fact that during their reigns and, to a great degree, under their guidance England was engaged in working out her political and religious unification. First of all the English kingdoms, Northumbria set the example of a wise and strong internal administration ; her political supremacy more than once extended from the Firth of Forth to the English Channel ; she leads the way in missionary enterprise, is the arbiter of religious policy. I doubt whether these northern counties have ever at any later time, even in the middle of the nineteenth century, exercised so preponderating an influence on the councils of the English race.

When Edwin became king in the year 617 he fixed his capital at this city of York, already famous as the metropolis of Roman Britain and the birthplace of Constantine ; and it may well be that not only the Roman walls and towers, but many public buildings

Reign of
Edwin.
617-633

still remained to add dignity to the dwelling-place of the new monarch.

But so restricted as yet was his dominion that, from the very walls of York, he could look upon the unconquered woods and hills of a British State. It was the kingdom of Elmet or Loidis, whose name still survives in that of the great city of Leeds. Its boundaries corresponded roughly with those of the present West Riding. On the east side, so thought the late Mr. Green, the line of the great Roman way, the Ermine Street—running from Doncaster through Castleford to Tadcaster—marked the limits of Elmet;¹ but I may call attention to the fact that the modern Sherburn-in-Elmet lies some miles to the east of the Roman way.

No wonder the British proved hard to drive from the district watered by the Wharf, the Calder and the Don. On the west lay the wild, bleak moorlands of the Pennines, where, even as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the king's writ hardly ran—"the land of romance," as Charles Kingsley called it, "in all England the land

¹ *The Making of England*, 254.

of romance"—a dictum which your own accomplished novelist, Mr. Halliwell Sutcliffe, has in more recent days done much to confirm. To the south there were, and long remained, great stretches of unbroken forest. Barnsdale, Went Bridge, Wakefield, Kirk-lee, each figures in the legend of Robin Hood and his outlaw band. No one is likely to forget the Rotherwood and the Conisboro' of *Ivanhoe*; the name of Nostell, between Wakefield and Doncaster, still perpetuates the memory of the North Stall of the Norman Foresters.

Faint whispers of rivalry between York and Leeds reach from time to time the ears of those outer barbarians whose unhappy lot it is to dwell outside the limits of your favoured county. This is a domestic matter which Yorkshiremen may well be left to settle among themselves; but whatever be the decision of the twentieth century, there can be no doubt that in the seventh century York conquered Leeds!

Edwin made the conquest of Elmet a stepping-stone for the invasion of the Isle of Man and of that large island off the coast of

Wales, thenceforth to be known as the Angles' Island—Anglesey.

Northumbria now stretched across the whole breadth of Britain, and just as Anglesey still by its very name preserves the memory of his western conquest, so the northern limit of Edwin's kingdom may be conjectured from the site of that famous city whose name is but an abridgment of Edwin's borough. His political influence, indeed, extended over a far wider area. He exercised that vague supremacy which is denoted by the term "Bretwalda" (Britain-wielder)—a supremacy which Dr. Hodgkin has compared to the superiority which at the present day the independent monarchs of Germany acknowledge to be vested in the office of German Emperor.

As Bretwalda, Edwin's authority extended southwards over the tribes of the middle English, over Wessex subdued by war, and perhaps over Kent allied by marriage.

Under one name or another the Northumbrian monarch ruled from Hampshire to the Firth of Forth, and he even, perhaps, had dreams of restoring historic York—for 1300

years ago it might be described as historic York—to its former imperial position. Something, indeed, he did bring back of the old Roman pomp, as, preceded by his standard-bearer, he walked the streets of his capital or rode through the provinces of his kingdom.

Within his immediate realm, wise administration secured peace and order. "A woman with her new-born babe," says Bede, "might walk scatheless from sea to sea where the rule of Edwin extended."¹ For the convenience of travellers he caused stakes to be placed by the springs on the roadsides, and on the stakes brass cups were fastened, and no man durst touch them for any other purpose than that for which they were intended. More than one of these wells may even now with much probability be identified, *e.g.* Robin Hood's Well on Ermine Street, a few miles to the north of Doncaster.

Edwin therefore is at least entitled to some echo of the praise which an Italian bishop bestows on the great Theodoric: "Such was the happiness of his kingdom that even the

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* ii. 16.

wayfarer was at peace ; for he did nothing wrong."

But neither the establishment of peace within nor supremacy without his realm exhausted the energies of the king. He brought about great though temporary spiritual changes in Northumbria. When he succeeded to the throne only the tradition of Christianity lingered in his kingdom, although in all probability little more than a generation had elapsed since the flight of the last British Bishop of York.¹ But in the meantime the Roman mission had established itself at the Kentish Court.

597 Scarcely had Ethelfrid's reign begun when Augustine, at the head of a group of Christian preachers, landed on the Isle of Thanet. The monk of the Forum had succeeded to the papal chair ; he had remembered the "Angel faces" ; and he sent out the Abbot of his own foundation of St. Andrew for the conversion of our fathers. It is quite possible

¹ Matthew of Westminster gives the year of the flight of the British bishops from York and London as 586. Dr. Browne agrees for reasons assigned on pp. 97-9 of his *Christian Church before Augustine*.

that those very steps which now lead up to the Church of San Gregorio on the Coelian hill witnessed the leave-taking of the great Pope and the Abbot Augustine ;¹ at any rate this is certain, that through the arch of the Ostian Gate, already consecrated by the last journey of Paul, there passed the first Archbishop of Canterbury, and six years later the first Bishop of York and the first Bishop of London on their way to Britain.

The story of the mission is familiar. I shall not attempt to narrate it.

Augustine has the glory of being first in the field, but it must be added that his work

¹ The modern church of S. Gregorio and the neighbouring garden undoubtedly contain many memorials of Gregory and his time—chair, table, chapels, and certain identifiable remains of the ancient church ; not to speak of Gregory's house still awaiting excavation underneath the present building. The original church dedicated by Gregory to St. Andrew has a twofold interest for Englishmen. For it was here that Wilfrid (*v.* Lecture II.) first made acquaintance with the Christian art of Rome. To this fact in all probability is due the dedication of his great church at Hexham to the same apostle. *v.* such books as Dudden's *Gregory the Great*, Chandlery's *Pilgrim Walks in Rome*, *Walks in Rome* by Hare and Baddeley, and Dr. Browne's *Augustine and his Companions*, 141-4.

was in large measure a failure. Outside Kent he effected little. The plain truth is that courage and enterprise, ability and breadth of mind, were sadly to seek both in himself and his companions. Assuredly the martyr missionaries of the English race did not derive their inspiration from the example of the early Archbishops of Canterbury. The little band of Roman monks had no sooner reached Gaul than they deemed it was safer ("tutius") to go back. Gregory soon found that he must himself supply whatever modicum of valour and common sense the members of this mission were likely to display. We who write and speak about them might have behaved no better than they, but it remains true that nearly all of them deserted their posts. After Augustine's death there was a revival of Paganism in Kent and the East Saxon realm. The remaining stalwarts met again, and this time decided, not that it was "tutius" but "sati" (the difference of meaning in this instance seems scarcely appreciable), to return home. This, too, before, so far as we know, any personal violence had been shown to a single Italian

monk. So Mellitus fled from his diocese of London; Justus deserted Rochester; and Laurentius intended to leave Canterbury had not a sound flogging from a nocturnal visitor, whom he quite unjustifiably styled St. Peter, frightened him into remaining. At a later date, as we shall see, and for a similar reason, Paulinus made all speed from York.

And the tact of the Gregorian mission was in no degree more conspicuous than its courage. Let us consider only their dealings with the Christian Britons. When Augustine landed—this may seem a startling statement, but it is true—Christianity was still professed over one half the area of modern England. Why did not the Roman mission join forces with the native Church for the evangelisation of the English? Overtures were made, and a meeting actually took place with the British (or, as they were often styled, the Welsh) bishops, but here Augustine found himself at the outset—I will not say in a false, but in a difficult position.

Pope Gregory, despite the severe epithets which he hurled against anyone who should

assume the title of Universal Bishop, was nevertheless already claiming, on behalf of the see of Rome, something more than mere precedence. He entrusted the British Church to the care and authority of Augustine, but the British on their part neither acknowledged the Pope's general claim to their allegiance nor did they relish the particular form which his paternal solicitude assumed. For they no doubt anticipated that Gregory's purposes once realised, they would find themselves delivered over bound hand and foot to another Pope at Canterbury, who would himself be under the influence of their irreconcilable foes, the English.

At a second conference, Augustine showed that tactlessness, that sense of Roman superiority, displayed two generations later by Wilfrid at Whitby. He did not rise from his chair of state to greet the British bishops. Then, too, he showed himself narrow and unsympathetic with respect to the many points of custom which divided the Celtic and Latin Churches.

They celebrated Easter, *e.g.*, on different days; they did not baptize after the same

manner ; nor was the tonsure of the Celtic clergy of the same shape as that adopted by the Roman ecclesiastic.

“ You go against our customs in many points, but if you will yield on these three, and will also join in preaching the word of God to the English, we will patiently bear with your other practices.”

“ We shall do none of these things,” replied the British ; “ nor will we have you for our archbishop.”

“ If you will not accept peace with your brethren,” said the indignant Augustine, “ you will have to accept war ; if you will not preach the way of life to the English, you will suffer death at their hands.”

These angry words closed the conference, and, with it, every possible avenue of reconciliation. The unique opportunity was thrown away. Unfortunately, too, Augustine’s companions were by no means willing to be out-done by their leader in point of discourtesy.¹

¹ Though it is to be noted that while the Irish Church never forgave Augustine, there is proof (*v.* the Stowe missal) that Laurentius, Mellitus and Justus were remembered in their prayers.

Here is the beginning of the astounding epistle which, according to Bede, Laurentius, Mellitus and Justus addressed to the Irish Church with the ostensible object of promoting unity!

“To our most dear brothers, the lords bishops and abbots throughout all Scotland (Ireland), Laurentius, Mellitus and Justus, servants of the servants of God. When the apostolic see, according to the universal custom which it has followed elsewhere, sent us to these western parts to preach to pagan nations, we came into this island, which is called Britain, without possessing any previous knowledge of its inhabitants. We held both the Britons and Scots in great esteem for sanctity, believing that they had proceeded according to the custom of the universal church; but becoming acquainted with the errors of the Britons, we thought the Scots had been better; but we have been informed by Bishop Dagan, coming into this aforesaid island, and by the Abbat Columbanus in France, that the Scots in no way differ from the Britons in their behaviour.”¹

Of course, faults and failings were not all on one side. That modest confidence which distinguishes the Welsh to-day was honestly

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* ii. 4.

inherited from their fathers. "If," said one of their early kings, "the Cymry believe all that Rome believes, that is as strong a reason for Rome obeying us as for us obeying Rome."¹ But thrice blinded must have been the men who, after years of familiarity with the characteristics of the Britons, could despatch, in the avowed interests of peace, such a letter to such a people.

But perhaps after all you will be inclined to say: "We can understand that tactlessness in conduct would give offence to the Britons; we can understand that they should refuse to acknowledge the authority of a man who would be under the control of their enemies; we can understand that the calm assumption of superiority would provoke the sensitive and despised nation into a refusal to accept the Roman customs; but why should a devout and fervid Church refuse to preach to the heathen at its doors?"

British missionary zeal was unquestionable. The religious sentiment of Wales was every

¹ v. Dr. Browne, *The Church in these Islands before Augustine*, 141.

whit as genuine and as passionate then as now.

A nation which during these very ages of stubborn resistance was bringing forth saints like David, like Cadoc of Llancarvon, like Kentigern, the missionary bishop of the Picts, to whom under his Scotch name of "dearest" the cathedral of Glasgow is dedicated, needs no defence against the charge of lukewarmness.¹ But, after all, these natural questions admit of a very simple reply. When we read the plaint of Gildas, when we think of what the Britons had endured, the five generations of pitiless and unprovoked strife, the loss of possessions, the massacre of kinsfolk, their civilisation, language, religion, blotted out and scarcely so much as a memory throughout great kingdoms where once they ruled, one cannot hold it for a reproach to the conquered race if they felt that for them the very Christian's heaven would lack its joys were eternity to be spent in the detested company of Angles and Saxons. It was not

¹St. Tenoc, the mother of Kentigern, is similarly commemorated at Glasgow under the strange guise of St. Enoch.

the waters of Severn that divided the hostile nations, it was a whole sea of blood.¹

And, inasmuch as Augustine failed to realise so obvious a fact, he failed also in the work he was sent to this island to perform. England was indeed to be Christianised, but not by him or by his mission.

The kingdom of Kent, then, remained their sole undivided and permanent conquest. Nevertheless, the first bright, brief gleam of Christianity in the north is due to the activities of the Roman monks.

Edwin's first wife had died, and he sent an embassy to the Christian king of Kent, asking for the hand of his sister. Full liberty of worship was promised for the princess and her suite, and Edwin added that he himself would not refuse to adopt the faith of his bride, if his wise men after examination pronounced it holier and more worthy than their

¹ Aldhelm of Malmesbury, writing in the early part of the eighth century, tells us that the people west of Severn would not pray in the same church or eat at the same table with the West Saxon Christians; and Matthew of Westminster 600 years later declares that this feeling of hostility on the part of the Welsh had not decreased.

own. So Ethelburga, whose pet name of Tata, the darling, has a curiously modern
625 sound, came to Northumbria. With her came Paulinus, the priest, already consecrated Bishop of York, a memorable figure in the history of the early English church.

But Edwin did not change his creed in a moment. His were not the impulses of the untrained barbarian. He hesitated long and thought deeply before he deserted the traditions of his fathers.

Pope Boniface V. wrote a letter of exhortation to Edwin. What effect this epistle had upon the recipient is unknown, but even after 1300 years the bathos of its conclusion provokes a smile. After expressing, no doubt with perfect sincerity, a wish that the heathen monarch might "put to flight the sensuality of devils and dwell in the brightness of eternal glory," the Pontiff adds, "We have moreover sent you the benediction of your protector, the blessed Peter, prince of the Apostles, i.e., a shirt with one gold ornament, and one garment of Ancyra, which we pray your highness to accept with the same goodwill as it is freely bestowed!"

One can only say with Montalembert that the Pope's presents testify either to his poverty or to the simplicity of the times.¹

Perhaps Edwin's decision was hastened by external events, if not by Papal exhortation. The kings of Wessex suspected, and possibly with reason, political designs beneath the Kentish marriage alliance. Their envoy made a determined attempt to murder Edwin at his royal villa of Aldby on the Derwent. Only the devoted self-sacrifice of a personal attendant saved the king. The birth of a daughter and Paulinus' simultaneous assurance that he had prayed for this happy event predisposed the king in favour of the new religion. If he returned victorious from his campaign of vengeance against Wessex, he would think further about the matter. Success attended his arms, but still he hesitated. Then it was that Paulinus suddenly appeared before the king and laid his hand on the royal head with the question "Rememberest thou this sign?" From what mysterious source the

¹ It is, perhaps, fair to add that Boniface displays unexpected knowledge of the world in his gifts to Edwin's queen, which included not only St. Peter's blessing, but a silver mirror and an ivory comb!

bishop had obtained a knowledge of Edwin's dream or vision in East Anglia we know not. One historian, M. Thierry, unkindly conjectures that Queen Ethelburga had revealed the confidences of the nuptial couch, another solves the difficulty by identifying Paulinus himself with the stranger who visited Edwin at Redwald's court. However this may be, the effect was great and immediate, though even now the king made no rash promises—he would confer with his councillors. So, at York or Aldby, the Witan met. There ensued a fateful and noteworthy discussion.

We have proof that in this the earliest English Parliament of whose debates we have record, utilitarian and idealist were each represented. Coifi, the pagan high priest, was apparently the first to express an opinion. His remarks give evidence that, in Northumbria, at any rate, the heathen priesthood was not permitted to override royal authority. There must, said Coifi, be something wrong with a religion whose most zealous votaries gain no earthly advancement. And he cited his own experience in support of his assertion.

Poor Coifi's luckless remarks have proved a fertile theme for criticism and condemnation from that day to this. He simply and avowedly served his gods for what he could get. That sort of service ceased, of course, with the introduction of Christianity! The commonplace observations of the high priest were followed by a speech of a very different and a much higher order. This earliest recorded example of genuine English oratory by its beauty and by its pathos, is well worthy of comparison with the best and noblest utterances of that long succession of "flashing" orators who have glorified our English tongue. It reveals to us that yearning for the solution of life's mystery, that longing for an assured immortality which, far more than its doctrine of love, commended Christianity to our heathen forefathers. "The life of man, oh king," said the English ealdorman, "is like a sparrow's flight through the hall on a winter's evening when you are sitting at meat with the warm fire lighted within and the wild tempest moaning without. At one door the bird flies in; it lingers for a moment in the warmth, and then flies out by the other door

and is lost in the darkness and the storm. So is our brief span of life. What comes before and what follows after who can tell? If this new doctrine can inform us let us obey its precepts.”¹ This touching and dignified appeal had its immediate effect. Coifi himself hurled his spear in scorn and defiance at the walls of the great temple at Goodmanham, and king and Witan embraced the new religion. Somewhere on the very ground at York which is now covered by your splendid minster, Edwin built a little wooden church in honour of St. Peter. Here he was baptized
627 by Paulinus on Easter Eve, 627. The whole kingdom hastened to follow the example of its king. For thirty-six days at the royal villa of Yeavinger in the Cheviots, Paulinus was actively engaged in baptizing converts. His very outward appearance was handed down from father to son by a loving tradition which has found record in the pages of Bede. Tall, slightly stooping, with black hair and aquiline nose, with features emaciated but majestic—such in face and figure was the famous bishop during those triumphant years

¹ *Ecc. Hist.* ii. 13.

of his life when he laboured between Trent and Tweed.

To the present day the memory of this great religious revolution is preserved by the place-names and traditions of northern England. Pallinsburn near Flodden Field, Jordan near Malton, the cross at Easingwold, the cross which once existed at Dewsbury, with the inscription: "Hic Paulinus praedicavit et celebravit"—local knowledge could doubtless furnish other examples—all bear witness to the first ardour of Christian enthusiasm.¹

¹ There is an interesting and much-discussed passage in Nennius (*v. Bohn's Library, Six Old English Chronicles*, 414) which states that Rum, the son of Urien, baptized Edwin and his subjects—"If anyone wishes to know who baptized them, it was Rum Map Urbgen." Dr. Browne (*v. Augustine and his Companions*, 173-4, and *The Conversion of the Heptarchy*, 220-2) seems inclined to the view that Nennius here preserves "a genuine tradition" which assigns to a member of the royal family of the British kingdom of Rheged, a large "share in the original conversion of Northumbria." He thinks that Paulinus was "a Briton by birth" but "educated at Rome." There is doubtless much to be said for the theory that many Britons were still left in the dells and on the moorlands of Northumbria. The British kingdom of Elmet, as we have seen above, had but lately

Unfortunately all this zeal was short-lived. Heathenism did not fall without a struggle. It was only after long persuasion, and then not at the hands of the Roman mission, that the English accepted Christianity. To certain sides of their nature, their dislike of the vague and uncertain, their longing for immortality, Christianity, as I have hinted, made strong appeal.

But they were intensely conservative. Bede, in his *Life of Cuthbert*, relates a miraculous story about a crowd of spectators who jeered at a company of monks in danger of being swamped at the mouth of the Tyne: "This will teach them to live differently from other people. Let them perish who would take away our old customs and impose new ones which nobody knows how to keep!"

fallen, and we hear of no massacre attendant upon Edwin's conquest. If Paulinus could preach to the great mass of the people in their own tongue, this would go far to account for his wonderful if evanescent success. There is indeed no proof that Aidan in after years needed an interpreter except when preaching to the notabilities (v. *Ecl. Hist.* iii. 3). It seems, therefore, not improbable that his Irish Gaelic could be understood by a considerable proportion of the people, who would, if British, speak of course the kindred British Gaelic.

Again, this new religion was looked upon as too gentle and mild for warriors. It was not manly in the eyes of our fathers. Mercy and love had little appeal for them. A Christian king of East Anglia was murdered for no other reason apparently than that this singular monarch had contracted the unfortunate habit of pardoning his enemies : " The new love has made the King womanish—too mild to rule over men."

The most famous champion of the old faith was that indomitable King of Mercia, whose savage prowess fills so large a chapter of seventh century history. Heathenism found in Penda its embodiment and its sword. The Mercian king was also a patriot. He had built up in Middle England a powerful state. Strife for supremacy between Northumbria and Mercia was inevitable. Penda leagued himself with Cadwallon, the Christian king of the Welsh, *i.e.*, of the Britons who lived in the modern Wales. There is no marvel in this. The secular desire for revenge on the part of the Welsh against the English had been intensified by the recent loss of Elmet and

of Anglesey, and for this Northumbria was responsible.

Feelings of racial and national hostility would far outweigh the sense of a common Christianity.

633 In the marshes of Hatfield, to the south of the Don, Edwin was defeated and slain. His work for supremacy and Christianity alike perished in an hour, like the work of the Hohenzollerns at Jena. Paulinus fled. The princes of disintegrated Northumbria abjured their faith. Cadwallon marched on York, and, more ferocious than Penda, showed no mercy either to woman or child. It was a year of unspeakable misery for Northumbria. But with the need came the deliverer. In this age prodigal of heroes scarcely had one great actor left the stage than another appeared to take his place. After Edwin came Oswald, whose short reign has been well described as "one of the noblest and loveliest pages in the history of our nation."

When Ethelfrid fell at the river Idle his sons took refuge on that little island of the Hebrides where, some seventy years before, the great Irish saint, Columba, had established

his famous monastery. The Christianity of Ireland, since the conversion of that country by St. Patrick, had developed along lines of its own in entire independence of Roman influence and tradition.

For good or evil a marked contrast in system and in spirit divided Latin from Irish Christianity.

Within the bounds of the Roman Empire the Church organisation was shaped by the political. Each city had its bishop; each province its metropolitan; and, in the West, the paramount ecclesiastical position of the Bishop of Rome was the natural outcome of that great city's long political supremacy.

But the Christianity of Ireland was not territorial nor episcopal. It was tribal and monastic. "The Thebaid reappeared" on western soil: not a few of the Irish monasteries contained each 3000 monks. There were bishops, of course, whose name was legion—tradition reports 700 of them—but officially within the limits of Ireland they possessed neither dignity nor diocese. The genius of the Celt was rather moral than

intellectual. Of system and order the Irish Church had little or none.

But in spiritual fervour, in those shining virtues which we often term "Franciscan," from the name of their great medieval exemplar, the Irish saints have had few rivals. Even St. Francis did not worship his Lady Poverty with more devout and consistent homage. "They had no money nor cattle,"¹ says Bede, when speaking of the monks of Lindisfarne. "If they received money from the rich, they gave it to the poor, for the whole care of their teachers was to serve God and not the world, to feed the soul and not the belly."

Their humility was such that even the great missionary prelates which the Celtic Church gave to England went about their vast dioceses on foot. King Oswin, *e.g.*, gave to St. Aidan a noble and richly caparisoned steed, but the bishop happened to meet a poor man on the road who asked alms. Immediately Aidan dismounted and gave the man his horse with its rich furniture, "for," adds Bede, "he was very compas-

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* iii. 26.

sionate, and, as it were, a father to the wretched.”¹ Needless to add, the royal donor was seriously annoyed, and the whole incident irresistibly reminds one of some of the freaks of simplicity which are narrated of Brother Juniper in the *Fioretti*. Again, Archbishop Theodore with his own hands had to lift on horseback St. Chad of Lichfield.

And their sympathy with dumb animals and with inanimate nature was as marked as their charity and humility. The story of Columba and his old white horse who, with every sign of extreme sorrow, came to take leave of his dying friend: the name of St. Cuthbert’s chickens, which still, after 1200 years, reminds the visitor to the Northumbrian coast of the love and care which the holy hermit lavished upon the eider ducks of Farne: these are but two of the many illustrations that will readily occur to our minds. But the faith and enthusiasm of Irish Christianity made of Ireland, as Montalembert has said, not only the great monastic nation, but “the missionary nation par excellence.” Multitudes of

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* iii. 14.

Irish preachers crossed to the mainland of Europe. One of the most famous of them all—Columbanus—founded the great monasteries of Luxeuil and of Bobbio. The conquerors of Gaul were converted or reconverted to Christianity by their means. There is a magnificent legend which tells how, before the preaching of Columbanus and his friend, St. Gall, the demons of the mountain and the flood “fled wailing over the waters of the Lake of Constance.” So successful and far-reaching was this missionary crusade that, for a moment, it seemed as if the Irish Church and the monastic rule of Columba would oust the Church of Rome and Benedictine custom even from their native Italian land.

Second only, if second, to Columbanus in service and in fame is Columba of Iona,¹ that

¹ The unfortunate similarity of names makes it necessary very carefully to distinguish between the contemporary Irish saints, Columba and Columban or Columbanus.

The career of Columba (c. 520 to 597) of Iona is perhaps sufficiently outlined in the text.

Columbanus (c. 543 to 615), whose rule at one time threatened to displace the Benedictine, was born in or

Irish prince and bard who, in remorse for the civil strife which his hot blood and revengeful passion had stirred up in his own country, became a voluntary exile on an inhospitable shore. Already a crowd of thirty-seven monasteries acknowledged Columba as their founder ; and his missionary zeal found ample scope among the pagan inhabitants of north Scotland and the Hebrides. Far more truly than either Gregory or Augustine, Columba deserves the title of Apostle of this island. From Iona as a centre, the saint and his fellow-preachers penetrated to the furthest shores and into the wildest dells of the Caledonian mainland. They sowed Scotland with monasteries and churches. And not only the mainland, but the islands of the west received the Gospel at their hands. In their frail skiffs they crossed "over the

about the very year of Benedict's death. He was the first and perhaps, as remarked above, the most prominent and successful of the long line of Irish missionaries to the continent. His foundation of Luxeuil was no unworthy predecessor of Jarrow and York. During the seventh century it was the most famous school in Europe. The chain of Luxeuil's daughter monasteries stretched north and west from Switzerland to the sea. For a brief period its influence equalled that of Cluny in later years.

sea to Skye." They braved the dangers of that tempestuous coast. No peril daunted them, no storm nor whirlpool nor denizen of the deep. When a whale threatened to overwhelm their boat, they still continued their course. "After all we are in the hands of God," said their leader, "both this monster and I."

Even the Shetlands and Orkneys, perhaps Iceland itself, were visited by Irish monks. To the rude natives of Scotland these monks taught the elements of agriculture, of navigation. Columba, too, was a statesman—the political adviser of that kingdom which his kinsmen, the Scotch from Ireland, had set up in the south-west of Caledonia.

But, prince and statesman as he was, he possessed also the widest human sympathy. "See," he said one day to the elders of his monastery, "at this moment while I speak such a one who was a blacksmith yonder in Ireland, see him how he goes up to Heaven. He dies an old man and he has worked all his life, but he has not worked in vain. I see the angels who are going for his soul."

Columba's influence did not end with his life. Not only did the monastic foundations which he had established in Ireland become the chief seats of European learning, but Iona itself, Icolmkill, became the ecclesiastical capital of Scotland, the most revered of our island sanctuaries, the recognised burial-place of the princes of Northern Britain.

"Where is Duncan's body?" asks the thegn in *Macbeth*.

"Carried to Columbkil."

We can, at any rate, understand the feelings which the sight of the venerable abbey produced in the grandiloquent Johnson. "That man" *is* indeed "little to be envied whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona." But Iona's greatest service to posterity consists in this, that from her walls and from those of her daughter houses went forth that saintly succession of ardent missionaries who were the chief agents in the evangelisation of England.

It is, as I have already said, the greatest mistake to suppose that the English became Christian through the efforts of the Augustinian mission. The kingdom of Kent was

the one exclusive conquest of Rome. All the other kingdoms of the Heptarchy were converted wholly or in part by the efforts of the Celtic monks. And the immediate political instrument in this revival and spread of Christianity was once more the Northumbrian kingdom.

Cadwallon might well have supposed that twelve months of merciless devastation and the death of three kings would have ensured the abject submission of Deira and Bernicia. But Oswald, at the head of a small body of friends who had rallied to his side, dared all in the name of Christ. A vision of St. Columba appeared to him on the eve of battle, and in full confidence of victory he set up the emblem of his faith near the spot where St. Oswald's Chapel now stands, hard by the line of the Roman wall on the moorlands above Tynedale. The whole army prayed to the Christian's God, and, under the sign
634 of the Cross, Oswald conquered just as truly as did that other native of Northumbria, Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, 300 years before. The Welsh king was killed as he fled from the field. It is a little strange

to reflect that after all the cruel and revengeful Cadwallon would no doubt consider himself as a more genuine champion of the faith than any Northumbrian arrayed against him! Although this triumphant day of Heavenfield restored Christianity as the religion of the Northumbrian court, yet Oswald knew well that the bulk of the people were pagan still. Not a church, not an altar or preaching-cross, no material relic of Paulinus' work remained in all Bernicia. The new king lost no time in requesting the abbot of his loved Iona to provide him with a bishop.¹ But the man who was sent soon wearied of the rudeness and obstinacy of his flock. "It is of no use," he said, "trying to convert such people." "Perhaps, my brother," remarked one of his brethren in the assembled council, "you were somewhat too strict with these untutored minds, forgetful of the Apostles' maxim about milk for babes." All present pondered on these words, and fixed on the speaker, whose name was Aidan, as the most suitable member of their community to hold the office of bishop. "Since

¹ *Ecccl. Hist.* iii. v.

he possessed," says Bede, "in an eminent degree the grace of discretion, which is the mother of virtues."

I have said that Columba was pre-eminently the Apostle of this island, but his personal labours did not extend to the south of the Tweed; and it was Aidan, sent to Northumbria in response to Oswald's appeal, who proved the immediate inspirer of much of that missionary effort which resulted in the conversion of the English kingdoms. So that we can hardly quarrel with the assertion of one of the greatest of his successors, the late Bishop Lightfoot of Durham, when he claims for Aidan the first place in the evangelisation of our race.¹

Abundantly did the new bishop justify the choice of his brethren. Not only did he prove to be adorned with the grace of discretion, but also, says Bede, "with every other excellence." That is high praise, but, with necessary deductions, we may the more readily accept it as coming from the pen of one who was by no means an adherent of Aidan's church, for Bede was a supporter

¹ v. *Leaders in the Northern Church*, 9.

of the Roman as opposed to the Celtic custom.

Aidan certainly was a conspicuous exemplar of every one of those high virtues which were the peculiar characteristics of the saints who drew their inspiration from Iona. Zealous, kindly, humble, tactful, but above fear or favour, he "taught none otherwise than as he lived." No wonder he succeeded where his predecessor failed.

Why, then, has his fame been overshadowed by men no greater than he, some of them not indeed his equals in sanctity or service? How many churches are dedicated to his contemporaries, Cuthbert and Bede, how few to Aidan? History, of course, is full of examples of disproportionate gratitude. Think of the many hundred towns and streets in America which are called after Lafayette! But what did Lafayette do for America in comparison with the invaluable work of De Grasse or Rochambeau, or, indeed, of Beaumarchais, whose names are almost forgotten in the country which they helped to victory? In the case of Aidan, the chief reason for this comparative neglect

no doubt arises from the fact that, like all his brother missionaries of the Celtic Church before the date of the decision of Whitby, he conformed to the usages of Columba and not to those of Rome.

But we must never forget that Northumbria owed Aidan to Oswald, and that the king worked with his bishop. Their aims were identical and their intercourse of such a character that it certainly deserves the epithet "beautiful." Often the king made himself Aidan's interpreter, and translated, for the benefit of his great lords and warriors, the heavenly words which fell from the lips of his bishop. In character, indeed, king and bishop had many points in common. The royal kindliness and generosity may be inferred from Bede's story of that dinner at Bamburgh, when Oswald and Aidan sat together with a silver dish of dainties before them.¹

The bishop was about to bless the food when suddenly the news was brought that a multitude of poor were gathered in the streets without, imploring alms. Immediately

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* iii. 6.

Oswald ordered the meat to be taken and divided among them, and the silver dish to be broken up and distributed. In admiration the bishop grasped the king's right hand. "May this hand," he said, "never grow old." Of his "pity," that rarest of virtues in pre-Christian days, though the Athenians did raise an altar to the goddess, we have proof in the narrative of Oswald's death. When he saw himself ringed in by foes at Maserfield, he did not hurl curses at his enemies, nor, after the fashion of his time, implore his friends to avenge his death. "Lord, have mercy on the souls of my army"—that was his last prayer.¹

Aidan fixed the seat of his bishopric close to the royal palace at Bamburgh, in that small storm-swept island girt with basaltic rock which then was called Lindisfarne, but in later years received the name of Holy Isle. "Even at this day," writes that brilliant historian to whose lecture on Roman Britain you have listened at this meeting, who himself made his home for years in the keep of Bamburgh—"even at this day for once that its

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* iii. 12.

legal designation of Lindisfarne is mentioned, you shall hear it a thousand times called by the endearing appellation of Holy Island given to it probably twelve centuries ago when it first received the imprint of Aidan's sandals."¹

I often wonder how many travellers are aware as their train rushes along the coast of Northumberland between Beal and Belford that at one time there was every probability that that island and that castle-rock away to the eastward would become the Windsor and the Canterbury of England. But that this would have been so had the Northumbrian supremacy lasted, had Edwin and Oswald and Oswy found worthy successors, there can be little doubt. Not only did Oswald make himself undisputed master of Northumbria, but he succeeded in restoring the supremacy of the northern state over all the English kingdoms, with the possible exception of Mercia, where the indomitable Penda was sullenly biding his time to strike once more.

The Welsh of Strathclyde, even the Scotch, and the Picts beyond the Forth, recognised

¹ Hodgkin, *History of England to 1066*, p. 155.

Oswald as their overlord. Abbot Adamnan of Iona, Columba's successor and biographer, styles the Northumbrian king "Emperor of the whole of Britain."

Thus the supremacy of Oswald, and that in no dim and shadowy manner, foreshadowed the coming empire of an Athelstane or an Edgar.

All the influence of the Bretwaldaship was, as we might expect in the case of so pious and so active a monarch, used for the promotion of Christianity. The new religion and the supremacy of Northumbria advanced side by side. Even in remote Dorchester on the banks of the Thames, the king of pagan Wessex received baptism in Oswald's presence. But all this success was fleeting. Oswald's reign was as brief as it was glorious.

Nine years after the great day of Heavenfield, he met with the fate of Edwin. Penda saw himself once more surrounded by Christian kingdoms. He seems, indeed, not to have objected so much to Christianity itself as to the Northumbrian supremacy which it involved.

A decisive conflict was bound to come.

We do not know the events which immediately preceded it. We only know that the hostile
642 forces met at Maserfield on the site of the later Oswestry (Oswald's Tree),¹ that once again the gold and purple banner of Northumbria fell into the hands of a victorious foe, and a great king and leader was slain. So lived and so died that crowned saint, Oswald of Northumbria, "The ideal of Christian royalty," so an ecclesiastical historian describes him.

We are in some degree in a position to judge whether this superlative praise is deserved. Oswald, pious though he was, was yet no *roi faineant*, no "cipher king," like St. Edward the Confessor; neither did

¹The village of Winwick, north of Warrington in Lancashire, is, however, a strong rival to Oswestry, and not a few writers favour its claims, *e.g.*, Dr. Cowper, Butler (*Lives of the Saints*), and apparently Dr. Browne. Oswald had a house at Winwick. "There is a large fee called Mackerfield in which is a large part of Winwick parish." An ancient cross-head exists at Winwick. It has "two panels which may represent Oswald's humility and dismemberment." On the south outside wall of Winwick Church are carved in old English characters the words "Hic locus Oswalde quondam placuit tibi valde."

his anxiety for the triumph of the Cross lead him to neglect the affairs of his own realm, like the brave and good St. Louis of France.

To the virtues or the merits of an Ethelfrid or an Edwin, Oswald united something of that "moral power which was to reach its height in Alfred." After his death, so the monkish chronicler tells us, the holy hand blessed by Aidan continued for centuries "entire and uncorrupted." Many miracles were performed in the presence of his bones, but surely his life of love and of enlightened public service lived at such an epoch and among a people just emerging from barbarism, that was the greatest miracle of them all.

Much might be said, did time permit, of the able and strenuous, but by no means impeccable ruler who succeeded his brother Oswald on the throne of Northumbria.

But, in respect both of immediate importance and of lasting results, two events stand out pre-eminent in this long reign of thirty years. One is the battle of Winwidfield, the other the Conference at Whitby.

Like Edwin and Oswald, Oswy did his

utmost to promote Christianity, and with it his own Bretwaldaship, among the kingdoms of the Heptarchy. A marriage alliance with Oswy's daughter brought about the baptism of the King of the Middle Angles, Penda's own son. This new convert, and also Oswy's friend, the King of Essex, were received into the Church at the royal villa "Ad Murum," probably within the limits of the present Newcastle.

Penda himself, whose valour and unconquerable spirit one cannot but admire, quietly permitted Northumbrian missionaries to enter his kingdom and preach their doctrine. The old champion of heathenism seems to have been quite tolerant in matters of creed, if a little contemptuous. What he did insist on was that, if a man professed himself a Christian, he should act as such. He "hated and scorned those whom he saw not doing the works of the faith they had received." Believers in the doctrine of heredity may begin to understand how it was that Penda was the father of no fewer than five canonised saints, and the grandfather of I know not how many more! After all, hereditary force

finds diverse expression—the house of Borgia counted a St. Francis among its sons.

But the conflicting interests of Mercia and Northumbria forbade a lengthy truce. The old king, despite the burden of his eighty years, renewed his raids; he even threatened Bamburgh itself with fire and sword.

Oswy gave hostages, offered gifts, in vain. Then with the courage of despair he and his son, Alchfrid, at the head of a small army marched south to repel the invader. Penda led to battle a great host. Thirty princes, Mercian, East Anglian, Briton, fought under his banner. The odds were enormous—according to Northumbrian tradition thirty to one! The more moderate Bede says three to one.

The armies met at Winwidfield, and there, 655 within the limits of the ancient kingdom of Elmet, the epoch-making fight was waged.

Of the tactics of this great day we are ignorant. Treachery seems to have decided the issue. The British king deserted with his men during the night before the battle, and worthily earned his nickname of “The king who ran away.” Ethelwald, Oswald’s

son, the under-king of Deira, who was serving with Penda, held aloof like Stanley at Bosworth. Half-heartedness on the one side and the courage of despair on the other, here probably lies the clue to the result. Penda and his bravest warriors were slain on the field, and the rest escaped from the sword only to meet death in the waters of the river Winwæd, swollen with autumnal rain. It is difficult to exaggerate the effect of this famous fight. Among the pitched battles fought in this island, it is second only to Hastings, if second, in lasting importance. The downfall of Mercia, it is true, proved but temporary ; at the death of Oswy the star of Northumbria paled ; but on the banks of Winwæd it was once for all decided what nation was to rule in England. The two hundred years' strife had ended, and the Welsh never again presumed to contest with the English the sovereignty of the island.

And, if Britain was gained for the English on this epoch-making day, it was gained also for Christianity. Only in Sussex did the gods of the German Walhalla hold acknowledged sway for a few years longer.

The question of the site of Winwidfield has long puzzled the brains of antiquarians. All the guidance that Bede affords us is to be found in this meagre statement that the battle took place "in the region of Loidis by the river Winwæd."¹ Loidis, of course, is another name for Elmet, and we must therefore look for the battlefield within the limits of that kingdom. It was perhaps certain that historians should identify the Winwæd with the river Aire, but Dr. Whitaker, in his *Loidis and Elmete*, contradicts this assertion, for the name "ARE" itself is British. Why, therefore, he pertinently asks, should it be changed to Winwæd, and, if changed, revived? The Winwæd he declares to be the little river Went, long spelt "Wynt," a tributary of the Don. Now, if Whitaker is right in his conjecture, I venture to submit that the most likely scene of conflict is on the line of the Ermine Street, the one great Roman road into Deira from Mercia. By that road Penda would probably advance and Oswy march to meet him. Here, then, where the Ermine Street crossed, and still crosses, the Went,

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* iii. 24.

near the modern Standing Flats Bridge, some two miles to the south of Pontefract, I suggest that Penda's forces encamped on that 15th November, 655, with the river in their rear—a river quite deep enough, harmless as it looks in summer, to drown a host in flood time; and that the victorious army of Oswy charged down the slopes, from the direction of the village of East Hardwick, to gain at one and the same moment England for the English and for Christianity.

Of the Conference at Whitby and all that it involved I shall speak in my second lecture. Here I must conclude what I have to say about the general policy of these three great kings. Seldom in their own day or since has this country produced a ruler who can compare with them, or with any one of them, in greatness and in goodness. Perhaps there are two who deserve to be ranked in that glorious company, and one of these not a crowned king!

In the seventh century all the interest of the national drama is concentrated in the great actors who tread the Northumbrian stage. At Heavenfield, at Winwidfield, they

decided in favour of the English the age-long conflict with the Britons. Thanks to their energy and zeal, it may be said of English Christianity that "Kings were its nursing-fathers." This island was the great missionary trophy of the seventh century. We may remember that Christianity triumphed in Northumbria at the very time when Islam was conquering the East. Edwin was an exact contemporary of Mahomet. Then, too, it stands to the credit of these Northumbrian kings that one and all of them laboured to establish good government at home.

"A king's most kinglike, most kingworthy toil
Begins, not ends, when he hath builded him
A bulwark 'gainst his foes. Then comes the task
Of rearing for his people such a home
That they within for fiery love of it
Shall leap as a lion if enemy threat their door."

These are words which the poet places in the mouth of Alfred. They reflect with equal truth the mind and policy of Edwin.

The condition of anarchy into which Northumbria fell during the centuries which followed their death but throws into higher relief the genius for war and for administration of those

great monarchs, who, while they lived, extended the bounds and influence of their kingdom, and preserved it at peace within.

Exactly how far we are indebted to Edwin, Oswald and Oswy for the promotion of English unity—that is a difficult question to decide. That they accustomed England to the idea of unification; that they almost achieved it politically; that by moral means they made it possible—all this is true. But did they of set purpose work for the realisation of the abstract idea? We may, perhaps, conclude that just as Bismarck aimed in the first place to promote the greatness of Prussia, and, secondarily, the unity of Germany; just as the prosperity and glory of little Piedmont was dearer to Cavour's heart than even Italian unity itself; so it was with these famous Northumbrian monarchs; the supremacy and greatness of their own kingdom, that was ever their primary consideration. This they endeavoured to promote not only by military force but by the spread of Christianity under the aegis of Northumbria. Of any desire for unity in the abstract and apart from Northumbrian interests, I discern no

sign before the day of the great meeting at Whitby, when Oswy, after the successful revolt of the Midlands had ceased to hope for the over-lordship of Britain. Then, indeed, it is permissible to suppose that the prescience of true statesmanship prompted Oswy to prepare the way. He saw that no single State could hope to exercise permanent supremacy on the sole basis of material force. But unity was in itself desirable, and, inasmuch as carnal weapons could not achieve it, he would replace them by spiritual agencies. The crozier should supersede the sword.

LECTURE II.

RELIGION: TWO GREAT NORTHUMBRIAN
CHURCHMEN, WILFRID AND CUTHBERT.

THE Conference at Whitby. Influence of women; the system of dual monasteries. St. Hild. The chief champions of Celtic and Roman Christianity. The considerations prompting opposition to Rome. Wilfrid's early life. The discussion at Whitby. Oswy's fateful decision. A short summary of the vicissitudes of Wilfrid's life. Examples of his personal fascination. The causes of Wilfrid's unpopularity. His tactlessness and conceit. His interference in the matrimonial affairs of Egfrid and Etheldreda. Ermenburga's jealousy of Wilfrid. The influence of women upon Wilfrid's life. His friendship with Alchfrid. The Bewcastle Cross. The real cause of Wilfrid's fall was his power. In what that power consisted. His buildings and princely splendour. Wilfrid's diocese partitioned. His appeal to Rome and its effect on Northumbria, Wilfrid's achievements and defects. Contrast between Cuthbert and Wilfrid. Brief outline of Cuthbert's life. Why is Cuthbert so famous and so revered? His magnetic personality. Nature and extent of his evangelistic labours. His personal character. Causes of his hermit-life at Farne. The wanderings of his body. Its final resting-place in the minster of Durham.

NOTE ON "CUTHBERT AND WOMEN."

WAS Christ or Woden to be worshipped in England? That question received its final

answer at Winwidfield, but still another remained.

What form of Christianity should prevail, the Celtic or the Latin? Seldom has it been given to one and the same man to decide a double issue of such enormous moment.

But in the year of the Conference at Whitby, Northumbria, though shorn of some part of her supremacy by the successful revolt of Mercia, had yet no considerable political rival. She was beyond question the chief source in this island of moral and spiritual inspiration.

It was, therefore, natural and, indeed, inevitable that the two rival ecclesiastical parties should submit the decision of the questions in dispute to the supreme tribunal of the Northumbrian king.

Accordingly, Oswy convoked an assembly representative of the nobility and of every order of the Church for the purpose of pronouncing a final decree. This ecclesiastical parliament—"synod," Bede calls it,— 664
met at Streoneshalh, that Whitby which a famous French historian declares to be of all monastic sites in Europe the nearest in

grandeur and picturesqueness to the ancient home of St. Benedict—to Monte Cassino itself. Of course the noble ruins which to-day look out from the summit of the rocks over the wide ocean eastwards, and on the north and west towards those billowy stretches of purple moorland which frame the red roofs of the old fishing town, are of a much later date than the famous Synod: but already Whitby was the seat of a great religious house composed of men and women—monastery and nunnery combined—and the whole was ruled by a woman, the Abbess Hild.

Women undoubtedly exercised at this time in England and during the centuries preceding the Norman Conquest a great and acknowledged influence in public affairs—an influence comparable to that which for a thousand years they wielded in France. But, as might be expected in an era of perpetual warfare, it was in regard to ecclesiastical matters that this influence was most frequently displayed.

Some woman, queen or abbess, is prominent at almost every stage of the Christian advance: Bertha of Kent, Ethelburga of

Northumbria, are only two of the royal ladies whose opinions and practice helped to mould the religious policy of the State. And there can be little doubt that Oswy's queen—who was none other than Eanfled, daughter of Edwin, born on the eve of that very day when her father escaped the West Saxon dagger—threw the weight of her powerful and, perhaps, decisive influence on the side of Rome.

The prevailing system of dual monasteries provided at this particular epoch a sphere of service which satisfied alike the piety and the ambition of high-born women of our race. No man could be found of courage sufficient to undertake the management of a company of nuns. But women did not hesitate to take charge of monks. The inherent capacity of women to rule, and the beautiful propensity of men to obey, have seldom received more convincing illustration!

Celtic Church history abounds with examples of these double houses ruled by abbesses of noble blood. Oswald's sister, Ebba, built her monastery, and has left her name on St. Abb's Head—that ultimate buttress of the

Lammermoors which juts out into the German Ocean. But no woman of her time is more deservedly famous than the saintly Abbess of Whitby, of the royal house of Deira. Hild was the successful ruler of a great foundation, the cradle of English poetry, the training school of bishops and of saints; but she was something more; her influence extended far beyond the bounds of her native land. Kings and princes came to her for counsel, drawn by the fame of her sympathy and her wisdom. At home she was the oracle, the "mother" of Northumbria,—“all that knew her called her ‘mother’ for her singular piety and grace.”

Historians have curiously ignored the lofty status and the national influence of Englishwomen in early medieval times. My friend, the late Dr. Reich, *e.g.* in his charming volumes entitled *Woman Through the Ages*, does not name St. Hild.

It would, no doubt, be easy to exaggerate the individual accomplishments or achievement of these English nuns. They have bequeathed to us no memorial in letters or

in art. They furnish no parallel, *e.g.*, to the literary genius of a Hroswitha von Gandersheim. Rather are they of the type of a Catherine of Siena or a Teresa of Avila, practical administrators, wise counsellors at need.

Of this noble company Hild was the chief, and when the Synod of Whitby met there was no doubt which side she would espouse. Throughout life the force and influence of her great personality were exerted in support of those Celtic traditions in which she had been trained. On the same side was Colman, Aidan's successor at Lindisfarne, and the saintly Cedd, missionary bishop of the East Saxons. It is generally supposed that Oswy himself at the beginning of the Council was to be numbered among the adherents of the Celtic party, but personally I cannot doubt on the evidence before us that the king was fully determined in his own mind before the discussion began, and that, for reasons theological, and still more for reasons political, he had determined in favour of Rome. Chief among the open supporters of Latin usage was Queen Eanfled, upon whose youthful

mind the counsels and example of Paulinus had produced the same indelible impression as those of Aidan upon the Abbess Hild. Then there was Oswy's son, Alchfrid, now under-king of Deira, who had long learned to "love and follow the Roman rules." There was Agilbert, the Bishop of Wessex, a Frank by birth, who could not or would not learn English, and, in consequence, had just been deprived of half his diocese and had voluntarily relinquished the rest. He was shortly to become Bishop of Paris, but for the moment was residing at the Northumbrian court. There was James the Deacon, "sole relic of the first conversion of Northumbria," that brave companion of Paulinus who after Edwin's death had refused to share the bishop's flight, but, through all the vicissitudes of thirty years, amid the storms of war, amid universal defection, a veritable Abdiel of Roman Christianity, had held aloft the old banner.¹ Last, and most important, there was King Alchfrid's bosom friend, a

¹ For a most interesting dissertation on the still existing traces of James' long residence near Catterick v. Dr. Browne's *Conversion of the Heptarchy*, pp. 214-19.

young and handsome abbot, the soul of this controversy, the man whose conviction, energy and eloquence had done more than all else to hasten the crisis, whose wonderful and dominating personality, full of contradictions, charming yet tactless, loving and humble one moment, unsympathetic and dogmatic the next, eager for pomp and display, yet on occasion inspired with self-sacrificing fervour, is known by the name of St. Wilfrid of Ripon.

The nominal questions to be decided at Whitby belong, or would be held nowadays to belong, to the realm of the infinitely little,—to wit, the exact date of Easter and the precise cut of the tonsure!

Undoubtedly, practical inconvenience did arise from the deviation, small as it was, between the Celtic and the Roman Easter, *e.g.* King Oswy with all his lords and thegns found himself keeping the Paschal Feast while Queen Eanfled and her servants were fasting for Lent.

But underneath these divergencies, trifling in themselves and such as honest men, desirous of unity, could have settled in an hour, there

lay great fundamental rivalries of nationality and tradition.

The tonsure might not mean much, but St. Columba did. Behind the Irish customs there were the hallowed memories and the glorious achievements of a long line of illustrious saints. Hence the unconquerable fidelity of Colman of Lindisfarne to the traditions of his Church. Add to all this the clashing of sentiment, the difference, wide asunder as the poles, between the Celtic and the Roman spirit, the counter-claims of individual freedom and of ordered system, the intense aversion, perhaps not at the moment formulated, but to which the career of Wilfrid speedily gave point and emphasis, even then felt by Englishmen to the interference of a foreign potentate in their domestic affairs—all these considerations doubtless in their degree prompted opposition to the Roman claims. On the other hand, the case for Rome may perhaps be best understood if we view it from the standpoint and through the eyes of its foremost champion.

Born the day after Edwin's death at Hat-

field, Wilfrid was now thirty years old. The son of a Northumbrian thegn, he had been trained in the Abbey of Lindisfarne.

Wilfrid.
633-709

Perhaps dissatisfied with the Celtic rules, perhaps out of mere longing to see and to learn, he determined to visit Rome. His handsome face and form, his geniality, his brilliance of intellect, secured him the favour of the queen. With Eanfled's consent, and carrying with him her letters of introduction, he set out on his journey.

It is not difficult to imagine the feelings of awe and admiration which the sight of the eternal city, of its sacred places, of its innumerable monuments of antiquity, inexpressibly imposing and beautiful even in decay, would arouse in the mind of a youthful stranger from a remote and rude island, where the very churches were built of wood and wattles.

Here at Rome Wilfrid was instructed in the usages of the Latin Church, in the rules and customs of Benedictine monasteries. Upon Wilfrid, as upon so many great men throughout the ages, rested the spell of Rome. He came back to his native land

with an unbounded reverence for the apostolic see, with an undisguised contempt for the rude customs and the narrow outlook of the Church of his youth, with a mission, as he thought, to *educate* his Church and nation, and to introduce among them something of the art and culture, the ecclesiastical organisation and ritual which he had found in the historic cities of Gaul and Italy, and especially in that ancient world-capital whose thousand years of material sway had ended, but whose thousand years of spiritual and moral influence had just begun. Wilfrid found a congenial spirit in Alchfrid of Deira, who had always loved the usages of his mother's Church. Alchfrid had founded at Ripon a religious house which was occupied by a colony of monks from Melrose. He now required them to observe the Roman custom. They, or many of them, preferred to return to their own country, and Wilfrid was installed as abbot of the reorganised community.

One of these Scotch monks, we may remark in passing, is the owner of a name as famous as that of Wilfrid himself. Centuries

later their banners waved together on many a stricken field, for the steward of the expelled community was no other than the future St. Cuthbert of Durham and Lindisfarne!

To this dignity then, the Abbacy of Ripon, we have brought the very superior young man who was now to be the spokesman of Rome at Whitby.

Colman began the discussion upon the date of Easter. I do not propose to follow the argument in detail on one side or the other. Colman's real meaning is contained in one sentence: "My usage is that which I have received from my elders who sent me hither as bishop. All our forefathers, men beloved of God, are known to have kept it after the same manner which, we read, can be traced to St. John."

And the gist of Wilfrid's reply may be set forth in a few words. "The Easter which we observe," he said, "is that which I have seen celebrated by all at Rome where the blessed Apostles, Peter and Paul, taught, suffered, and were buried. Thus I found the feast celebrated in Italy and France, wherever I journeyed for pilgrimage and

prayer. So it is also in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece, through all Christendom, save only among these persons and their partners in obstinacy, the Picts and the Britons, who in a certain fraction of two remote islands stupidly maintain their opinion against the world."

"You agree," he observed in answer to a later remark from Colman, "neither with John nor Peter, neither with Law nor Gospel."

"Can it be believed," asked Colman, "that our reverend father Columba and his successors beloved of God, men eminent for sanctity and for miracles, could err in this matter?" "As for your father Columba and his followers," rejoined Wilfrid, "I will not quote the text, 'Many shall say to me in that day,' because it is more just to believe what is good than what is evil of persons whom one does not know. Wherefore, I do not deny them to have been beloved by Him whom they served with rustic simplicity if with pious intention. If that Columba of yours, or I may say of ours, was a holy man, is he to be preferred before the

Prince of the Apostles to whom our Lord said, 'Thou art Peter, and to thee will I give the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven'?"

So Wilfrid ended his speech.

However indignant even at this day we may feel with the tone of dogmatic superiority, the tactless irreverence of his allusions to the glorious Columba, Wilfrid's purpose was fulfilled. He well knew the argument which would most surely tell with the king. Neglecting smaller considerations, he pleaded with all his force for unity. "Do you think that your small number in a remote island is to be preferred to the Universal Church throughout the world?"—that is the essence of all that he uttered.

We must not take too literally the king's obviously humorous way of ending the discussion. "You acknowledge," he questioned Colman after Wilfrid had sat down, "that Christ gave to Peter the Keys of Heaven? Has he given such power to Columba?"—"No." "Then," said the king, "since Peter is the doorkeeper, I will obey his decrees lest when I come to Heaven's gates he refuse to open." So with a smile Oswy

made that fateful choice, fraught with such enormous consequences for a thousand years, which has indeed so profoundly influenced the whole course of English history.

What, in brief, did the decision involve? Beyond doubt the unity of England—immediate ecclesiastical unity and, as a consequence of this, political unity also ere two centuries had gone by. It meant the introduction of order and system into the Church; the spread of ancient culture—letters, architecture, painting, music; and it meant yet more than this. Through centuries of strife and oppression the Christian Church stood almost alone as the representative and champion of justice and mercy, and now the decision of Whitby, by conferring upon the Church in England that unity and organisation of which she stood in need, gave to her at the same time the power to raise her voice above the din of arms and to make effective protest against tyranny and misrule.

Of course, there is another side to the question; valuable elements were lost to the Church, irreparably lost. It is, I suppose, not too much to say that English Christianity

has never reproduced the fervour and the love, the simplicity and unselfishness, which characterised the Celtic teachers of the seventh century.

Then, too, as everyone knows, the interference of the Bishop of Rome with the affairs of the English Church and State brought with it in after years a legion of complications in respect to which I am happily not called upon to express an opinion.

The later career of Rome's chief advocate at Whitby affords one continuous and striking illustration of the more immediate results of his triumph.

Nearly half a century after the Whitby Conference, Wilfrid, while riding across Mercia, recounted to his companions the splendid unique story of his long life, crowded with incident, with excitement, with immense successes, with reverses unparalleled—perhaps undeserved. No such continuous narrative can be attempted in a lecture such as this, but let me try to sum up in a few words the vicissitudes of fifty years. Shortly after the great Conference was over, the Northumbrian bishopric fell vacant. It was

natural that Wilfrid, young, energetic, in the flush of victory, should be chosen for this most important position. At the same time the seat of the episcopate was transferred from Celtic Lindisfarne to York, with its many monuments of Roman greatness.

As Bishop of York, therefore, Wilfrid crossed to Gaul to be consecrated. But the pomp and culture of Frankish church life proved too attractive. He stayed away too long. When he came back to his rude and despised Northumbria, he found his place filled. The saintly Chad had been consecrated bishop in Wilfrid's stead. With a moderation we should scarcely expect, the ambitious young prelate quietly retired to his monastery of Ripon.

We find him during the years that immediately followed fulfilling the duties of a bishop and founding many monasteries in Mercia¹ and, later still, in Kent.

¹ The churches of Brixworth, Earl's Barton and Barnack were in all probability built or modified by Wilfrid's workmen or under his influence (*v.* Dr. Browne's *Theodore and Wilfrith*, p. 48).

Restored to his episcopate by the intervention of the famous Theodore of Tarsus, who now occupied the see of Canterbury, he enjoyed nine years of almost unexampled prosperity. The richest and most powerful subject in the State, the Wolsey of Northumbria, Wilfrid outshone the crown itself in brilliance and splendour. Then sudden, unexpected, came his fall. King and archbishop, leagued together, parcelled out his diocese without his knowledge or approval. Unhesitatingly Wilfrid appeals to Rome, crosses the sea, and pleads his cause in person. The Lateran Council decides in his favour. He returns triumphantly to England, only to find to his intense amazement the papal decree ignored, contemned. 669-678

Months of imprisonment are succeeded by six glorious years of exile, for by no poorer word than "glorious" can we adequately describe his apostolic labours in heathen Sussex. 681-687

Then came a reconciliation with the dying archbishop, a partial reinstatement at York, to be followed by another and still longer exile, by a second personal appeal to Rome, 692

where the indomitable old man of seventy, after crossing the Continent on foot, obtained a second decree in his favour.

705 Last scene of all this lengthy controversy is the great Council by the river Nidd, where our ancestors thus early displayed that national capacity for compromise, on the possession of which we not unreasonably pride ourselves. Wilfrid was recognised as bishop, not indeed of York, but of Hexham—a mere fractional part of his former immense diocese; and once more his great domains and monasteries in Mercia and Northumbria were restored to him.

Was there ever such a life of vicissitude, crowded too with personal adventure of every sort and kind—tragic, humorous, romantic?

I often marvel that historic fiction has overlooked Wilfrid. His career would furnish abundant material for a second *Cloister and the Hearth*, if only we could venture to presuppose the pen of a second Charles Reade!

Whatever the causes of Wilfrid's misfortunes, this at least is certain—that they were brought about by no lack of personal

charm. If ever human being was born with a "genius for friendship," it was surely Wilfrid. He fascinated almost every man with whom he came in contact—I use the term "man" advisedly, because his experiences with women were more varied—not only the Celtic monks of Lindisfarne, over whom, in his early youth, he acquired such an ascendancy that they actually encouraged him in his project of studying in Rome itself the questions in dispute between the rival Churches; but the King of Kent, who was so delighted with him that, instead of expediting his journey, he kept him for months at his Court; the Archbishop of Lyons, who offered him the government of a province and the hand of his niece if only he would settle in Gaul; the Archdeacon Boniface in Rome, who "instructed him as his own child."

Then, too, he charmed the emissaries of Ebroin, the all-powerful Frankish mayor of the palace, who put to death Wilfrid's friend, the Archbishop of Lyons, as in later years he put to death another prelate whose name, by a curious freak of fate, is more often on the lips of Yorkshiremen to-day than that of

Wilfrid himself—I mean Leodegarius, Bishop of Autun. Of course you have changed his name. He is Leodegarius no longer, but Leger, and his diocese is not Autun, but Doncaster! Wilfrid was saved by his charm of manner alone from the fate of his patron, the archbishop; and these victories of personal fascination did not grow less frequent with advancing years. One might instance, *e.g.*, the kings of Frisia and of the Lombards, upon whom neither bribes nor threats could prevail to surrender their guest and friend.

It would be easy, as it is needless, to multiply such examples.

No question of false doctrine, nor yet of personal misdemeanour, was the cause of Wilfrid's fall. "Of what have I been guilty? What crime have I committed?" he repeatedly enquired in vain. No lack of zeal could be alleged against the man who, dispossessed of his see and robbed of his wealth, made his personal misfortunes the occasion for the first preaching of the Gospel in Frisia, against the man who even in exile could not be restrained from the evangelisation of Sussex, where, says

Bede,¹ "he exercised the office of bishop both by words and deeds," deservedly honoured by all. Still less could Wilfrid's ability be called in question—first of our ecclesiastical statesmen, first in the long line of our English orators, his intellectual position is secure.

What, then, were the genuine causes of the bitter and sustained opposition which he encountered in Northumbria?

Historians sometimes speak as if his unpopularity was enshrouded in impenetrable mystery. I find myself only in partial agreement with them.² Once many years ago I was present at a political meeting when the late Duke of Argyle brought forward some twenty-nine convincing arguments against Home Rule. When I came to set down on paper the reasons for Wilfrid's misfortunes I found them, in my judgment, at any rate, quite excellent and convincing, and eighteen in number! But, do not be alarmed, I will

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* iv. 13.

² Of course I am well aware that the accusations "manifold and great" (Eddius) brought by king and bishops against Wilfrid are nowhere set forth in detail.

only enumerate a very few. The late Duke of Argyle was an accomplished orator, but, if I remember rightly, his audience began to nod after the exposition of his third reason!

Both causes personal and causes political and ecclesiastical affected Wilfrid's life. Some of them I have named, others I have no time to name; but each and all of them help us to understand not only the character of the man, but the history of his time.

His tactlessness and bigotry where ecclesiastical affairs are concerned has already received illustration at the Conference of Whitby. "It seems," as Dr. Bright has said, "as if his stay in Rome had infected him with the Roman love of domination." There were no bishops in this island good enough to consecrate Wilfrid when appointed to the diocese of York! Irish bishops wouldn't do; British bishops wouldn't do. He must have Roman consecration, unquestioned orthodoxy. There were only two English prelates who satisfied this requirement; one of these was personally objectionable, and Wilfrid either forgot the other or held that the canonical number of three was essential for the due

performance of the ceremony. He therefore crossed to Gaul, and thereby, in the eyes of the Celtic party, added insult to injury—insult accentuated by a prolonged stay in that attractive country.

As he began so he continued. Throughout life the smug self-satisfaction, the complacent superiority displayed by Wilfrid, must have been intolerable to his opponents and annoying to his friends. When he first revolted against Celtic custom and went to Rome he was barely twenty years old. Infallibility at that age is natural, at forty it is inexcusable, but Wilfrid never ceased to be infallible till he rested in his grave.

The series of events which brought the bishop into acute collision with the Court seems to have originated in his interference with the matrimonial affairs of King Egfrid.

Egfrid, the able and victorious son and successor of Oswy, had taken to wife the Princess Etheldreda of East Anglia. Etheldreda was always at heart a nun. She revolted from the marriage state and determined to take the veil. The king implored Wilfrid to use his all-powerful influence, for

he was the queen's most trusted friend and counsellor, to dissuade Etheldreda from her resolve. But the subtle ecclesiastic made pretence of obeying the king while secretly encouraging the queen. She took refuge at Coldingham, the religious house founded and still governed by Ebba, the sister of Oswald and Oswy. The king followed, and Etheldreda fled beyond the reach of Egfrid's hand into those wide-spreading fen-lands where she reared her great monastery in the Isle of Ely, and so lived and ruled as to become in after years, under the name of Audrey, one of the most popular of English saints. I suppose nowadays few people would be found to justify the proceedings of Wilfrid or of Etheldreda, but when we read that Oswy's three sons, who reigned over Northumbria, were each in turn deserted by their wives, we cannot but suspect that there must have been something singularly unattractive about this generation of the royal house!

With the moment of Etheldreda's flight, Wilfrid's brief years of unalloyed prosperity ended. Storm succeeded calm. Egfrid married again, and his second wife, Ermen-

burga, was persistently hostile to the bishop. Wilfrid's biographer calls her "Jezebel." That is an epithet of which monastic writers are fond. All that it really implies is a certain difference of opinion between the hero of the biography and the lady so designated.

In this case Queen Ermenburga and her husband were benefactors to the Church. They were as friendly with the holy Cuthbert as they were hostile to Wilfrid. He alone was sought out by the queen as an object of hate. Why was this? It could not be because Ermenburga was afraid of another piece of matrimonial interference on the part of Wilfrid, for after all the bishop had befriended the former queen. No; in lieu of any more satisfactory reason, one may conjecture the cause to be jealousy pure and simple, jealousy, not only of the bishop's power and wealth, but of the more than princely splendour and pomp of this great ecclesiastic who towered above the Crown. The queen therefore determined to compass the bishop's ruin, and, with that end in view, brought her influence to bear upon her husband's mind already predisposed against

Wilfrid for private and for public reasons. It was not long before the wished-for opportunity presented itself. But here, perhaps, I may pause to note a most curious phenomenon in Wilfrid's life—the extraordinary influence of women. Montalembert has not overlooked it, but it has never received the attention it deserves.

If anyone entertains the slightest doubt concerning the immense, and not seldom preponderating, influence wielded by Anglo-Saxon ladies, not only within convent walls, but in the life of courts and in the councils of the nation, let him study the career of Wilfrid.

Of course, throughout medieval times we frequently find the name of a venerated saint linked with that of some particular woman, relative or friend. Benedict had his Scholastica, Augustine his Monica, Francis his Clare. But Wilfrid's case is in no sense parallel to theirs. With him, it is a question not of one particular woman but of a score! And, as we have seen, they were by no means all of them friendly. "*Cherchez la femme,*" and you would go far to account for

almost every vicissitude of Wilfrid's life. It was the enmity of his stepmother that guided his youthful footsteps to Lindisfarne; it was the friendship of Queen Eanfled that enabled him to pay his longed-for first visit to Rome. St. Hild of Whitby, for public and ecclesiastical causes, was his bitter opponent until her death. Queen Ermenilda of Mercia and Queen Etheldreda of Northumbria were ever his attached friends, so also was Ebba of Coldingham.

Ermenburga's jealousy, then, had much to do with his first exile. He took refuge in Mercia only to encounter the hostility of another queen. From Mercia he fled into Wessex, to be driven in turn out of that country by yet another royal lady, the sister of Ermenburga. If it had not been for the powerful and disinterested friendship of the Queen of Sussex, Wilfrid in his exile seemed not unlikely to solve the problem of perpetual motion! On the other hand, it was the persuasive speech of the Abbess Elfleda of Whitby in the great council at the Nidd that finally prevailed on the Northumbrian thegns to sanction that compromise by which Wilfrid

was enabled to spend his last years in comfort and peace.

The public reasons which brought about and helped to perpetuate his fall may perhaps be reduced to three, and of these the first, though of little historic importance,¹ retains at least an antiquarian interest even to the present day—I mean Wilfrid's friendship with Oswy's son Alchfrid, the under-king of Deira.

664 Alchfrid "disappears from history" shortly after the Whitby Conference. Possibly he became involved in some conspiracy against his father's rule, possibly that father was merely jealous of the recognised patron of the triumphant Roman party. However this may be, Alchfrid's disappearance coincides with the months of Wilfrid's absence in Gaul for the purpose of consecration. Paternal displeasure, therefore, reinforced by the arguments of the Celtic party, may help to account for the displacement of Wilfrid. The lover of antiquity is not likely to forget Alchfrid, the man in whose honour was

¹ But possibly of more historic import than was at one time supposed (*v.z.* p. 87, footnote 2).

erected in the year 670 that Runic column which still stands on the wild and desolate Bewcastle Fells, a torso indeed, but richly embellished with sculptured fruits and flowers and emblematic figures, and with an inscription which records the name of "Alchfrid, son of Oswy and aforetime King."¹ The mystery of Alchfrid remains unsolved, but if the still doubtful portion of the Bewcastle inscription admits of the conjectured interpretation, "Pray for his soul's great sin," we may perhaps conclude that throughout Wilfrid's life the hands of his opponents were strengthened by the knowledge that he had once played the Achitophel to Alchfrid's Absalom.²

¹ For a most interesting discussion of the Bewcastle Cross *v.* Dr. Browne's *Conversion of the Heptarchy*, Lecture vii. and appendices.

² The statements in the text reflect the view at present accepted, which is based on Eddius' contemporary but partisan Life of Wilfrid. Dr. Browne, in his *Theodore and Wilfrith*, suggests a solution, logical, if not entirely conclusive, of the mystery attaching to Wilfrid's calm acceptance of Chad's appointment to the diocese of York.

His reasoning is based on the opening sentence of the sixteenth chapter of Bede's third book.

"In the meantime King Alchfrid sent the priest Wilfrid to the King of France to be consecrated bishop

But in my view the original predominant cause of Wilfrid's fall was his power—a state-

over him and his people . . . and Oswy following the example of the King his son sent a holy man of modest behaviour . . . to be ordained bishop of the church of York. This was a priest called Chad."

It appears evident, if Bede's statements are to be accepted, that Oswy's selection of Chad was not intended to clash with Alchfrid's previous appointment of Wilfrid. Accordingly, if I do not misinterpret Dr. Browne, his suggestions are :

1. That Alchfrid's sub-kingdom consisted only of Western Deira (excluding York), and that the words "over him and his people" carry with them the inference that Wilfrid was consecrated bishop over this part of Deira only.

2. As Alchfrid disappears from history at precisely the period of Wilfrid's absence in Gaul, it is likely that the conjectured words on the cross at Bewcastle, "Pray for his soul's great sin," refer to some treachery or disagreement with his father which involved Alchfrid's dethronement and death at this particular date ; and

3. As a consequence of Alchfrid's disgrace, his scheme for the creation of a special bishopric for his sub-kingdom would naturally fall through ; hence Wilfrid's retirement without protest to Ripon.

Dr. Browne also suggests that the possible cause of the trouble between Alchfrid and Oswy might well be Oswy's discovery that his son had by trickery obtained Wilfrid's consecration in Gaul not simply as Bishop of Western Deira, but of York itself. Dr. Browne is, in fine (*T. and W.* p. 49), definitely of opinion that there is the most intimate connection between Alchfrid's offence and Wilfrid's submission.

ment paradoxical only in form and already in part explained.

Let us for the moment consider his position—sole bishop of an immense diocese which, thanks to Egfrid's victories, extended across the whole island between the Humber and Forth, and perhaps even as far as the Tay. No spiritual shepherd, however vigorous and devoted, could effectively minister to the needs of so scattered a flock.

The new monasteries in Northumbria and in Mercia, enriched as they were by huge grants of land and peopled by thousands of monks, naturally regarded the man by whom many of them had been established, and all of them regulated according to the rule of Benedict rather than that of Columba, with the respect and devotion due to a founder. Wilfrid was the real king of this numerous and influential monastic army. And, inasmuch as all the youths of position received their training at the convent schools, a new generation was growing up with the hallmark of the great bishop stamped upon it.

There was also the real and pressing danger pointed out by Bede in an admirable

and statesman-like letter, that the lavish grants of which I have spoken would ere long so impoverish the Crown, that it would no longer be able to reward the warriors and servants of the State. Add to all this that in sheer splendour Wilfrid far outshone his sovereign. As a great and enlightened patron of every branch of art known to the Europe of his day, he deserves all praise. Thanks to him and to his friend Benedict Biscop, the builder of the twin churches at Wearmouth and Jarrow, Northumbria became even more widely known as a musical centre than it is to-day. Wilfrid and Benedict brought over from Gaul or Italy skilled artificers—masons, glaziers; they imported rich vestments, and manuscripts still more precious; they founded famous schools of gold-work and embroidery.

Wilfrid was especially renowned as a builder. He repaired and, *horribile dictu*, he apparently whitewashed the cathedral here at York! There are, indeed, some who identify Wilfrid with the original inventor of whitewash! He erected the noble, and in this island, the then unequalled churches of Ripon and Hexham. For the minster of

Hexham, long regarded as the most beautiful building north of the Alps, he laid under contribution the camps and cities along the line of the Roman wall. Nothing of his work now stands above ground, only his crypts remain. Many of us—most of us, perhaps—have looked with admiration upon the Arch of Severus in the Forum at Rome. It was dedicated in honour of that emperor and of his sons, Caracalla and Geta, in the year 203 A.D. After the murder of Geta his name was suppressed in the inscriptions throughout the empire. Some years ago, in company with the enthusiastic sexton of the Abbey Church at Hexham, I descended the steps which lead down into the crypt, and gazed at its carved stones. In the dimmest, remotest corner my companion held up his candle—"Here is something I think that will interest you," and, sure enough, it was the same partially erased inscription to the Emperors Caracalla and Geta which I had last read on the Arch of Severus! Perhaps nothing has ever more closely brought home to myself the vast extent of that dominion, which from the Forum and the Palatine

stretched forth its arms across continent and sea, to dictate what should or should not be inscribed on the stones of a Northumbrian moor!

All this splendour of building was rivalled by the pomp and ceremonial which Wilfrid encouraged and loved, his more than princely hospitality, and the gorgeous retinue by which he was attended.

It is asserted that, despite his surroundings, Wilfrid was a shining example of the monastic virtues. But when the most convincing proof of the bishop's austerities, which his friend and biographer can produce, consists of the statement that he bathed in cold water both night and morning, I confess that I feel inclined to reserve judgment. About the fact of Wilfrid's frequent ablutions there is, of course, no doubt at all, for in later life the pope expressly forbade him to continue the practice as injurious to his health. In cleanliness, as in so many other respects, Wilfrid seems in this island to have been the first of the moderns—but I digress.

In view, then, of all his wealth and his enormous influence, can we wonder that king

and queen should eagerly seize the first opportunity which presented itself of humiliating their too-powerful subject?¹ Now, it so happened that at this time the Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus, first of the great organisers of the English Church, was entering upon his work of reform. A strong man, he meant to be, in fact as well as in name, head of the English Church. He would no longer suffer semi-independent prelates in vast and unwieldy dioceses. Wilfrid and Theodore were sure to clash.

You see the Bishop of York was powerful enough to overshadow alike his secular and his ecclesiastical superior. These, therefore, made common cause, and, without the consent or cognisance of Wilfrid, they partitioned his great diocese into four. It was a high-handed and discourteous act, for which the only excuse offered by the spoilers was their confident belief that Wilfrid would refuse his

¹ Possibly, too, Egfrid particularly objected to the way in which Wilfrid had come by his most valuable possessions—Ripon given by Alchfrid and Hexham by Etheldreda !

assistance to a measure essential for the welfare of the Church.

"What is my crime?" asked Wilfrid. "Why am I divorced from my diocese and robbed of my lands?" "We charge you with no crime," was the reply, "but we will not alter our judgment."

Promptly Wilfrid adopted a course which may be described as the logical outcome of the arguments victorious at Whitby, but which carried in its train consequences undreamt of by King Oswy and the moderate party.

He appealed to Rome, to the mother church, which had sent out Augustine and his successor, Theodore, to rule at Canterbury. Wilfrid was the herald of Anselm and Thomas à Becket. Even Hildebrand himself could not have been more persuaded than was Wilfrid of the rightful claim of the Roman pontiff to the obedience of the Western churches, could not have been more eager to make of the see of Rome a free, independent and supreme tribunal, to which victims of oppression from what land soever they came might appeal with the full assur-

ance of receiving impartial and indisputable justice. But it is to be noted that this anticipation by Wilfrid of the Hildebrandine ideal, this open acknowledgment of "outlandish" authority, immediately enlisted against him the full force of national sentiment, civil as well as ecclesiastical. Englishmen, Yorkshiremen, then as now, were most unwilling to admit that any foreign tribunals, secular or spiritual, possessed the shadow of a right to interfere with English affairs, to overrule our domestic decisions, bad or good.¹

Twice the Pope decided in Wilfrid's favour. But papal decrees had no weight with the stubborn Northumbrians—"He is all the more blamable,"² said the king and arch-

¹ How intense was the animosity which Wilfrid had aroused may be gathered from the fact that his enemies persuaded the Frankish mayor of the palace to waylay him on his journey to Rome. By a somewhat grotesque mistake, due to a resemblance in name, the mayor's emissaries seized upon a certain inoffensive bishop called Winfrid, took his property, slew his followers, and left him naked. They were misled, says Eddius, with delightful naïveté, "by a fortunate error in one letter." He overlooks, as always, every point of view save that of his hero.

² Eddius, ch. 44.

bishop in the Council at Easterfield, "in that he has chosen to be judged at Rome rather than by us." "So long as I live,"¹ said King Aldfrid, the successor of Egfrid, "I will change nothing out of regard to what you call a mandate of the Holy See."

"There can be no doubt," as Montalembert observes, "that Wilfrid mistook the indispensable conditions of religious peace in England."

But, after all, it can be said for Wilfrid that he greatly dared and greatly succeeded.

"Was not I the first,"² exclaimed the aged bishop in his eloquent apologia at Easterfield, "was not I the first to root out the poisonous seeds sown by Scottish missionaries? Was it not I who converted and brought back the whole nation of the Northumbrians to the true Easter and the Roman tonsure according to the laws of the Holy See? Was it not I who taught them the sweet harmonies of the primitive Church? Was it not I who constituted monastic life among them after the order of St. Benedict?"

And surely he might have added, with

¹ Eddius, ch. 55.

² Eddius, ch. 44.

at least equal force and truth, "Was it not I who converted the whole nation of the South Saxons to the faith, who aided in the conversion of heathen Mercia, who introduced the Gospel to the tribes of Frisia?"

Whatever may be our opinion of his policy and aims, there is certainly much about Wilfrid to commend and to admire.

What he lacked was charity and sympathy ; he could not appreciate an opponent's position ; he let nothing stand in the way of what seemed to him likely to advance the great cause, no public sentiment, no private consideration : national and personal feelings were alike ignored.

Both by his merits and by his defects he invited disaster ; excess of zeal blinded his eyes ; tactlessness, conceit, personal ambition, and love of display multiplied and envenomed hostility. The wonder is not that he fell, but that he rose again, and that he died still Bishop of Hexham and in the enjoyment of all his princely domains.

It is somewhat of a relief to turn for a moment, before I conclude, from this strenuous and stormy career to the possibly no less

strenuous, but comparatively peaceful, life of Cuthbert.

Wilfrid and Cuthbert, both of them, were canonised saints, but the one was essentially a fighting man, concerned with statesmanship, with debate, with affairs; the other entirely or primarily with the saving of his own soul and of the souls of others: the one is the saint of the market-place, the other of the cloister and the mission-field. There is almost as deep a gulf between them as between Francis of Assisi and Innocent III.

Cuthbert.
637-687

Let me recall to you the familiar outlines of Cuthbert's life. The handsome, athletic shepherd boy of Lauderdale becomes a monk of Melrose; not the Melrose we know and love, but an earlier foundation planted by a colony from Iona, near the woods and rocks of Bemerside. Then, for some short time, we find him officiating as steward in Alchfrid's monastery at Ripon, only to return with his brethren to Tweeddale, when the king, at Wilfrid's instigation, insisted on the observance of the Roman customs. It must, however, at once be admitted that when

these customs had obtained the support of national authority by the decision of Whitby, Cuthbert—as Prior of Melrose and afterwards as Prior of Lindisfarne—accepted them apparently without question or hesitation, though, at the same time, without bating one jot of his attachment to that school of Christianity in which he was trained. He never despised his precious and beautiful heritage. To the end he exemplified, in a degree seldom surpassed, all those graces and virtues which were the peculiar characteristics of Columba's church. After some twelve years' work at Lindisfarne, he left his brethren and determined to live a solitary life as a hermit on the neighbouring islet of Farne. Here on this desolate shore, after eight years had passed away, we find assembled a notable body of men, the foremost in all Northumbria,—King Egfrid himself, Bishop Trumwine of Abercorn, “other religious and great men,”¹ I quote Bede, together with many of his ancient monastic brethren who had crossed over from Bamburgh with the object of persuad-

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* iv. 28.

ing Cuthbert to accept the vacant see of Lindisfarne.

They all knelt and adjured him with tears not to refuse their request. Thus, almost by force, the hermit became a bishop.

685-687 His episcopate was short, scarcely two years, and he came back to die, as he would have wished, in his humble cell at Farne.

Such then in baldest outline was Cuthbert's life, but I must perforce desert narrative and once again fall back on problems, conscious that I have the highest authority for so doing. "For in history," said the late Sir John Seeley, "everything depends upon turning narrative into problems."

Why is Cuthbert so famous and revered? What deeds or qualities have earned for him his unrivalled position as saint of all saints in Northumbria? He was not the representative and champion of an ecclesiastical party like Wilfrid, not a great organiser like Theodore of Tarsus, not a martyr for the faith, as we may perhaps term Oswald, not an inspired singer like Cædmon, or a great historian like Bede. Beyond question his

fame has been enhanced by the picturesque legends which have clustered round the story of the wanderings of his body. He owes something to the fact that, unlike his equally great predecessor, Aidan, Cuthbert accepted and practised Roman in place of Celtic customs. But he possessed, there can be no doubt of it, that subtle, unanalysable gift, a great magnetic personality—a personality that throughout life impressed itself on young and old, small and great, on all with whom he came into contact.

We may smile at the remarkable story gravely related by Bede, though he does not vouch for the authenticity of its details, how a group of boys, of whom Cuthbert was one, were playing in the fields, and in childish frolic were twisting themselves into all kinds of ridiculous attitudes. “On a sudden one of them, apparently about three years old, runs up to Cuthbert, and in a firm tone exhorts him not to indulge in idle play and follies, but to cultivate the powers of his mind as well as those of his body.” “Why do you, holy Cuthbert, priest and prelate, give yourself up to those things which are so

opposite to your nature and rank?"¹ It is evident that Northumbria in those days bred some precocious, if I may not say priggish, boys, although we in Yorkshire may derive consolation from the fact that the incident occurred on the northern bank of Tweed! Setting aside obvious exaggeration, it is fair to infer from the story that even in earliest youth Cuthbert's mental and moral superiority was unmistakably apparent to the children of Lammermoor, as in later life to the magnates of Northumbria.

It was, perhaps, in the capacity of an evangelist that Cuthbert rendered most immediate service to mankind. He possessed in a superlative degree every quality that makes for success in the mission field—not merely that attractive, impelling personality of which I have spoken, but ardent conviction, sympathy, tact, infinite patience, courage, faith, and all these combined with remarkable beauty of feature and form, and the gifts of an accomplished orator. He had one great initial advantage over Aidan. That man needed no interpreter who had himself, as

¹ Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*.

Mr. Green has said, "caught the rough Northumbrian burr on the banks of the Leader."¹

Very few of the moorlands and valleys between Forth and Solway were left unexplored by his youthful zeal, and in advancing years, during his short episcopate, his journeys extended far and wide over the length and breadth of his vast diocese. It is quite possible that St. Cuthbert's Church under the castle walls at Edinburgh is a memorial of the saint's personal presence. We have no record of his visit to North-West Lancashire, but it is likely that he would wish to inspect the considerable gift which King Egfrid made to him of "the district of Cartmel and all the Britons within it."² We know that he frequently visited that princely estate conferred upon him by Egfrid of the city and territory of Carlisle. Here it was that, as Cuthbert's archaeological friends were showing to him with pride the Roman monuments of their city, he leaned on his staff near a wonderful fountain whose site is

¹ But cp. the footnote on Paulinus, Lecture I. p. 29.

² Montalembert, iv. 143.

still pointed out in the chief street of the modern town, and had that amazing vision of the great disaster in the pass at Nechstanmere, where, on that very day and in that very hour, King Egfrid and all his host fell in battle against the Picts. Edinburgh, Carlisle, Cartmel, Lindisfarne, York—these are the limits of Cuthbert's journeys, a wide area, much of it trackless marsh and moor, sparsely inhabited by a people rugged and stern as their own glens and mountains, with ears little open to cajolery or persuasion.

But wherever Cuthbert went he made friends. The miracles recorded of the saint provide us with a clue to some part of his marvellous influence. They are, with few exceptions, instances of what I suppose in these days we should call clairvoyance. He could read character to a nicety; not only could he read faces, but hearts. "To different minds," says his anonymous biographer, "he addressed the exhortations they severally needed, as knowing beforehand what to say, to whom, when and how to say it." Then, too, he practised what he preached. "Whenever," says Bede, "he bade a person do a

thing, he showed the way by doing it himself.”¹ He suffused around him an atmosphere of love. “He had,” I again quote the anonymous biographer, “in full measure that most excellent gift of charity without which all virtue is nothing.” “He deemed that to advise and comfort the weak was equivalent to an act of prayer.”²

It may occasion astonishment that a man such as this, surcharged with tenderness for every living thing, should voluntarily forsake the world, and live for eight years the life of a recluse upon the rock of Farne. But, read in the light of history, there is nothing either very rare or very mysterious about his conduct.

We must view it with the eyes of the men of his day, and try to discover what effect it would be likely to have upon him and upon them. After all, individual salvation was the chief aim of the monk’s life; and Cuthbert was a monk, although in his life, as in the lives of his Celtic contemporaries or of the Franciscans in later years, very diverse elements were mingled.

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* iv. 28.

² *Eccl. Hist.* iv. 28.

But perhaps the diversity is more apparent than real. These men, and hundreds like-minded with them, in many sections of the Christian Church, have shown that there is no essential incompatibility between the cloister and mission-field, between the transcendental ecstasy of the spiritual recluse and an active and self-sacrificing service for one's fellow-men. How highly Cuthbert himself estimated the inward victories of a life of retirement may be gathered from a remark which he made when lying in his cell a few days before his death to brethren of the house of Lindisfarne. "I would fain rest," he said, "in this spot where I have fought my little battle for the Lord."¹

The inward and spiritual—that was what weighed with Cuthbert in his last hour. Even the holy triumphs of his busy and useful life were accounted as nothing; as for rank and station and the esteem of men, they were always less than nothing with him.

Not that Cuthbert should be described as a fanatic; on the contrary, it may, indeed, with truth be said that he was, above all

¹ Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*.

things, a moderate man. Seldom, even in the rapture of a saint, did he lose his hold on actualities, or cease to appreciate the true proportions of things.

With characteristic humility he admitted that his own hermit life, "free," as it was, "from secular care," was in no degree superior in grace or purity to that of those monks who in cloistered obedience lived as members of communities. There is no doubt that modesty, geniality, humour, were characteristic of Cuthbert, as in later days of Francis, whom he so closely resembles. On one occasion we find him mildly rebuking his brethren from Lindisfarne, who had called to visit him in his hermit cell, because they had not eaten a fat goose he had killed for their special benefit. "I cannot eat all day long; you must give me a little rest";¹—we almost hear his words as he replies with a gentle smile to the hospitable entreaties of the Abbess of Whitby.

And I think we may go further and say that Cuthbert was fully aware that the fame of his austerities and of his sanctity would

¹ Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*.

be noised abroad.¹ He knew that to produce a permanent effect for good upon the lives of the rude and unreflecting population of his native land, he must startle them into virtue.

By the force of a conspicuous personal example, by the evident triumph of spirit over flesh, by an exaggeration even of the virtues demanded from the average Christian, he would arrest attention, he would call forth reverence and worship for a faith which was able to supply the motive power wherewith to work these miracles of abnegation.

Was not this the policy, with infinite reverence be it said, and with obvious qualifications, of the Founder of Christianity Himself? Assuredly it was the policy of the closest of all His imitators, St. Francis

¹ There exists, indeed, ample proof of this statement in the reply above mentioned of the dying saint to the monks of Lindisfarne, who petitioned that he would consent to be buried in their church. "I would," he answered, "fain rest in this spot where I have fought my little battle for the Lord. . . . And for you, too, it would be better that I should rest here, on account of the influx of fugitives and criminals to seek sanctuary at my grave. *Humble as I am, they will seek this asylum, for the fame of me has gone forth that I am a servant of Christ*" (Bede, *Life of Cuthbert*).

of Assisi. Upon the desolate rock of Farne, Cuthbert held up the standard of the Cross before the eyes of all Northumbria, just as truly as did Oswald at the Heavenfield. He emphasised, *e.g.*, the virtue of love by consistently practising it, not towards men only, but towards dumb animals. Francis preached to the birds of Bevagna; the eider ducks of Farne, his loved companions, are yet called by Cuthbert's name.

We have abundant proof also that in Cuthbert's career the habits of a recluse neither dulled his sympathy for his fellows nor detracted from the wisdom of his counsel. Not merely the birds, but the fishermen, too, of the little Northumbrian archipelago found a friend in the man who knew so well the perils of that dangerous coast. He became in a special sense the patron saint of seamen, and it seems, therefore, particularly appropriate that in these modern days the name and heroism of Grace Darling should be associated with those very islands inhabited so many generations before her time by a man whose all-embracing sympathies had transfigured him in the minds of the rough

Anglian sailors into a sort of Castor and Pollux of Northumbrian Christianity. As Montalembert has said, if Grace Darling had lived in the seventh century, she would have been certain of a place in the calendar of saints with St. Ebba and St. Hild.

The fame of Cuthbert's love and wisdom soon outstepped the limits of his native Northumbria, and from the remotest parts of Britain there flocked to his solitary cell statesmen, ecclesiastics, pilgrims of temptation and of sorrow, in search of that counsel and comfort which was so freely and wisely dispensed by the hermit of Farne. Cuthbert was not old—barely fifty years—when the lighted torch, dimly discernible across six miles of sea, announced to the brethren of his already famous abbey that their great saint and bishop was gathered into the life
687 of the fathers. He was buried close to the high altar of Lindisfarne, but his history does not end with his life.

875 Two hundred years later the monks, in fear of Danish attack, placed the head of Oswald in Cuthbert's coffin, and fled northwards into Tweeddale with these most

precious of all their relics. There are but few dwellers within the bounds of ancient Northumbria who have not some local interest in that medieval *Odyssey*, the wanderings of Cuthbert's body. To those who delight in such antiquarian lore, I commend the late Archbishop of Glasgow's *Life of St. Cuthbert*. In that monumental volume more than one hundred fascinating pages are devoted to the posthumous history of the saint. Legend and miracle adorn the tale :

“ In his stone coffin forth he rides,
A ponderous bark for river tides ;
Yet, light as gossamer, it glides
Downward to Tillmouth cell.”

So run the familiar lines. Yet even the second canto of *Marmion* conveys but a faint notion of the extent of the wanderings. Within the wide district bounded at the four corners by Norham on the north-east, by the town and county of Kirkcudbright (Cuthbert's Kirk) on the north-west, by Ormskirk in Lancashire, and by the Yorkshire villages of Ackworth and Fishlake, there are forty churches dedicated to St. Cuthbert, which are supposed to mark each a spot where the

monks rested with their precious burden. The coast of Cumberland, the plain of York, the hills of Cleveland, the woodland reaches of that beautiful river whose vision, glorified by distance and by years, prompted the exiled Jacobite of Macaulay's poem to "sigh by Arno for his lovelier Tees"—all in turn were trodden by these loyal and untiring feet.

- 999 Four generations had passed away before the long pilgrimage ended. From that day to this, with but short intervals, the body of Cuthbert has found a home on the historic promontory of Durham. For many ages the piety and patriotism of the English border found expression in rich offerings at the shrine of the great northern and national saint, and still, happily for every lover of history and of art, we may see the splendid result of their zeal and their labour in all the matchless magnificence of that noble hill from whose summit the Cathedral of St. Mary and St. Cuthbert "looks down upon the Wear."

NOTE ON "CUTHBERT AND WOMEN."

It is well known that for centuries women were debarred from entering any of the churches in which the body of Cuthbert had rested. This custom appears to have been observed in obedience to the saint's traditional injunction with respect to his own cathedral church at Lindisfarne.

The query may well be raised—How was it possible for a man of such wide sympathies as Cuthbert, so genial, so broad-minded, to be associated with the framing of such a rule?

It would seem indeed, in spite of persistent tradition, that the basis of fact is doubtful. Roman Catholic writers express for the most part entire confidence that the original decree was uttered by Cuthbert's lips. Protestants ask for proof.

The regulation is first named by Simeon of Durham and Reginald of Durham writing in the twelfth century; and the cause commonly assigned for Cuthbert's injunction is the disorder and immorality of which he had

been a witness in Ebba's monastery at Coldingham. Be this as it may, the rule was observed with extreme rigour at Durham. Here not only church, but cemetery and abbey precincts were forbidden ground. Later the rule was relaxed, and the presence of women was permitted at the western end of the nave.

“ There still is traced the bound'ry line
Monastic rigour drew,—
Weak barrier now 'gainst female foot—
A cross of marble blue.”

Eventually Bishop Pudsey (1153-1197) is said to have built the beautiful Galilee expressly for female use. But for centuries the monks kept strictest guard against feminine intrusion. Even Queen Philippa, when in 1333 she accompanied King Edward III. to Durham, was compelled at midnight to fly half-dressed to the castle because the monks had found out that she was in her husband's room at the priory. Quaint stories are told of the experiences of those who dared to disobey the saint's command. Reginald, for example, relates that on two occasions feminine curiosity prompted an invasion of the

forbidden precincts. A certain Helisena, a servant of the Queen of Scotland, was discovered in the church in the disguise of a monk and incontinently expelled by the sacristan "using words less euphonious than effective."

Urged on by what some would describe as that intellectual curiosity which has so long distinguished Newcastle, but which an ancient writer unkindly calls "the instigation of the devil," two ladies from that city donned male attire and attempted to view St. Cuthbert's shrine. They also were discovered, and had to do penance in the churches of St. Nicholas and All Saints.

In Simeon of Durham's tales, still slighter faults are visited by even more tragic punishments. But no paraphrase does justice to Simeon, so I venture to quote him—story and moral and all. They are not without value as a revelation of the medieval mind.

"There have been women who in their boldness have ventured to infringe these (St. Cuthbert's) decrees; but the punishment which has speedily overtaken them gave proof of the magnitude of their crime. One

of these, named Sungeova, the wife of . . . Gamel, as she was one night returning home from an entertainment, was continually complaining to her husband that there was no clean piece of the road to be found, in consequence of the deep puddles with which it was everywhere studded. So at last they determined that they would go through the churchyard of this church (*i.e.* of Durham) and that they would afterwards make an atonement for this sin by almsgiving. As they were going on together, she was seized by some kind of indefinite horror, and cried out that she was gradually losing her senses. Her husband chid her and urged her to come on, and not to be afraid ; but as soon as she set foot outside the hedge which surrounds the cemetery of the church, she immediately fell down ; and, being carried home, she that very night ended her life.”¹

“Here follows,” says Simeon, “another narrative of the same kind. A certain rich man who afterwards resided amongst us in this church, wearing the dress of a monk,—had a wife ; and she, having heard many persons talk of the beauty of the ornaments of the church, was inflamed, woman-like, with the desire of seeing these novelties. Unable to bridle her impetuous desires, for the power of her husband had elevated her above her neighbours, she walked through the cemetery

¹ *History of the Church of Durham*, chs. xxiii. and xxiv.

of the church. But she did not go unpunished ; for presently she was deprived of her reason,—she bit out her own tongue ; and in her madness she ended her life by cutting her throat with her own hand. For, as it was no easy matter to keep her at home, she wandered from place to place ; and one day she was found lying dead under a tree, her throat all bloody, and holding in her hand the knife with which she had committed suicide. Many other instances might easily be added to these, showing how the audacity of women was punished from Heaven, but let these suffice.”

It would be interesting to listen to a discussion between Simeon of Durham and a modern Suffragist !

In spite, however, of this rigorous and long-continued exclusion of women from his churches, we should make a great mistake if we inferred that Cuthbert was a misogynist. The simple story of his life is in this matter the strongest argument against the authority of tradition. Not a few of his “miracles” reveal the saint in direct and kindly association with women. He had friends among all classes, religious and secular, in cottage and in palace. But very naturally we hear

more about the women of station and of power. Queen Etheldreda and Queen Ermenburga of Northumbria held him in high regard. As we have seen, he was the guest of Ebba at Coldingham. Oswy's daughter, Elfleda, the charming and vivacious Abbess of Whitby, was his dear friend.

The last visit he ever paid was to Verca, the Abbess of Tynemouth,—“ You will bury me,” such were his last directions to his brethren at Lindisfarne, “ wrapped in the linen which I have kept for my shroud, out of love for the Abbess Verca, the friend of God, who gave it to me.”

LECTURE III.

LEARNING: BEDE AND ALCUIN.

IMPORTANCE of the schools of Jarrow and York. Contrast between the lives of Wilfrid, Cuthbert and Bede. Bede's title of "Venerable." His life at Wearmouth and Jarrow. His encyclopaedic learning. A criticism of his historical writings:—his care in collecting material; his discretion; literary style; wit. Bede as biographer. "The Life of Cuthbert." "The Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow." Bede's scientific writings. His moderation and good sense. His letter to Egbert of York. The story of his death.

Resemblance and contrast between Bede and Alcuin. Alcuin's boyhood. His life at York. The merits of the Cathedral School. Alcuin meets Charles the Great at Parma, and accepts his invitation to Frankland. Charles' achievements and genius. Alcuin's unfailing interest in English affairs. His qualifications for his great position as Minister of Education to Charles. His broad humanity. His scholarship. Conflict in Alcuin's mind between Orthodoxy and Zeal for Knowledge. His anxiety for the preservation of ancient learning. His prose writings (*v. note*). His poems. Alcuin's share in Charles' educational policy. The nature of his work as Master of the Palace School. Charles' educational Capitularies. A scheme of universal free education and its results. Other reforms instituted by Charles and Alcuin (*v. note*). Alcuin as royal counsellor. Nature of the letters exchanged between Charles and Alcuin.

Events leading to Charles' epoch-making Italian journey of the year 800. Alcuin's famous letter of 799. Charles crowned Emperor on Christmas Day, 800. Motives which prompted him to accept the crown. The value and wisdom of Alcuin's counsel. The services of Northumbria to the cause of Learning. Northumbria past and present.

IF the close of the seventh century witnessed the gradual diminution of Northumbria's material sway and spiritual influence, her "great days" were by no means ended, for she was only on the threshold of her intellectual pre-eminence. For three generations the schools of Jarrow and of York were the most famous in all the West. Learning, driven from the continent of Europe by war and by misrule, found in Northumbria a refuge and a home, and thence, by the instrumentality of Alcuin and his fellow-scholars, it recrossed to Gaul and Germany to become the basis of the culture of the Middle Ages. The work of the two great schools is summed up for modern ears in two great names. All that was best and holiest in Jarrow is represented by Bede, just as the highest product of the training and scholarship of York is embodied in the statesman-teacher Alcuin.

Bede
c. 673-735

If, as we have seen, the contrast between Cuthbert and Wilfrid is great, that between Bede and the princely Northumbrian prelate is greater still. Wilfrid's magnificent foundation at Hexham stood high above that romantic valley where the twin streams of Tyne rush from the fastnesses of the Pennines and the Cheviots to pour their united waters towards the sea. Bede's humbler Jarrow looked out upon an equally beautiful but more peaceful and smiling landscape. The same river, but broader, deeper, its torrent stayed, its banks redeemed from the wilderness by the labour of the monks, its surface bearing goodly vessels for the use of mankind. But the scenes upon which these great churchmen so often gazed with their mortal eyes were not more diverse than their lives and work. In the one case all the romance attendant on a career of strange vicissitudes, of heights and depths, of almost unexampled success and equally signal failure : and in the other, the serene continuous flow of long years of unremitting industry, and of more immediate and obvious and undoubted service.

Bede is the highest and best representative of the purely cloistered life of his day. He did not mingle with politics, or ecclesiastical controversy, or Court intrigue; he did not even travel, like Cuthbert, as a missionary preacher. But to many throughout the ages his name has seemed in no degree less worthy of respect and reverence than that of the saintly hermit of Farne. No one can accuse Bede of fanaticism. Extravagance of conduct in one direction or the other, moral or immoral, was wholly foreign to his nature. His was not the burning passion for souls or the missionary enthusiasm of a Cuthbert. Still less was there in the monk of Jarrow the slightest trace of that spiritual pride and too aggressive sanctity which occasionally dims the pure outlines of Cuthbert's beautiful character. Fuller, in his *Church History*, tells of a certain foreign ambassador who "coming to Durham addressed himself first to the high and sumptuous shrine of St. Cuthbert—'If thou beest a saint, pray for me'; then, coming to the plain low and little tombe of Bede—'Because,' said he, 'thou art a saint, good Bede, pray for me.'"

But the Church of Rome has never seen fit to award the supreme honour of canonisation to Bede. Even the title "Venerable," though entirely deserved, was not applied to Bede in his own generation. It is first found in a book of the tenth century. This epithet appears to imply a degree of holiness which falls a little short of the standard required for a canonised saint. The Venerabiles were like certain of David's mighty men; they were "more honourable" than the majority, but "attained not" to the select few. It is scarcely necessary to remind you of the beautiful legend which ascribes to a spiritual visitant the first application of this honourable term to Bede. One night a tired disciple left incomplete the epitaph which he was composing in praise of his revered master. "*Hac sunt in fossa Bedae . . . ossa.*" So ran the unfinished line. In the morning the astonished writer found the gap filled up by the word "*venerabilis.*" An angel had done this thing, or, if he had not, it must be agreed that he had failed to take advantage of a unique opportunity for paying a graceful compliment to a worthy man.

c. 673 "Born between Wear and Tyne,"¹ such, if I remember rightly, is the beginning of the inscription upon the beautiful Runic cross set up to his memory at Roker; and it would have been equally true to say "lived and died between Wear and Tyne." From that little corner of England he seems seldom to have stirred. His life was peaceful and eventless, but not on that account the less useful or the less to be admired.

It may be said, and with truth, that the life of Bede is one long and most telling argument in favour of the decision of Whitby. It provides concrete illustration of the excellent results that flowed from that quickened intercourse with the Continent and its culture promoted by the adoption of Roman usage. Wellnigh every phase of the civilising influence of monasticism finds illustration in the story of the twin houses of Wearmouth and Jarrow.² The stone church at Wear-

¹ Bede says himself that he was born in the territory of the said monastery (viz. Wearmouth and Jarrow). The Anglo-Saxon version reads "on sundurlonde þæs ylcan mynstres," which strongly suggests the modern Sunderland to the south of the Wear (*v.* Plummer, I. ix.).

² *v.* Bede, *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*.

mouth was built by a friend of Wilfrid, a young Northumbrian noble, Benedict Biscop by name. Benedict brought over Frankish masons and glaziers to aid in the work. Lamp and vessels, mosaics and windows—all the adornments of the new church—were productions of foreign art. Here Bede was received as a little boy, and he must often c. 680 have looked on the western porch and tower of St. Peter's at Monkwearmouth, which still stand blackened by time and fire, priceless relics of seventh century Northumbria. After a year spent at Wearmouth, Bede was transferred to Jarrow, where also Benedict had erected a church, which he dedicated to St. Paul. Wearmouth and Jarrow were, in fact, intended by their builder to reproduce on English ground some feeble likeness of the splendour of St. Peter's on the Vatican and St. Paul's outside the walls of Rome. Six times Benedict went on pilgrimage to the sacred city, and on each occasion he brought back treasures of many kinds—relics, pictures, images, and, above all, books. It was during one of these expeditions that the plague carried off every monk at Jarrow save

the abbot and one boy of twelve years. Little could Benedict have foreseen that in that youthful scholar¹ there was one who would make better use of the books thus placed within his reach than any student of his day, even with the libraries of Gaul and Italy open before him. For nearly fifty years Bede spent his leisure in learning or teaching or writing. In these pursuits he found, as he tells us, his constant pleasure, but it was not a selfish pleasure. His own pupils, his own generation, owed him much. He was, as St. Boniface said, a "candle which the Lord lighted up" in Northumbria; but the debt of posterity is greater still. Only by unremitting industry during the intervals of his monastic duties could he have made himself master of such wide and varied knowledge. There can be little doubt that the leading classic authors were as familiar to Bede as were the Christian fathers. It is, indeed, with something akin to shock that suddenly in the midst of a story of miracles

¹The identification of this boy as Bede himself is merely a guess, but it is a guess which commends itself to every student of Bede's life (*v. Plummer, I. xii.*).

performed by the relics of King Oswald at Bardeney readers of Virgil come across their old friend :

“Conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant.”¹

The student, however, may take comfort from the thought that this is nothing to the shock which he would have sustained had he stumbled unprepared upon Mr. Plummer’s awe-inspiring list of the classical authors cited by Bede.² I have counted them ; there are between 130 and 140 of them, many of whom are quoted many times.

Bede was nothing short of an encyclopaedia of the learning of his time. He had something of the versatility of a Renaissance man. Not only a great scholar, but a teacher successful and beloved, and a writer who wrote—upon how many subjects did he not write? Theology, as was natural, claimed his chief attention—he comments upon every book of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation—but astronomy, mathematics, rhetoric, music, grammar, medicine, he discoursed upon each and

¹ *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 11.

² *v.* Plummer, I. li. to lii.

all.¹ Burke has well styled him "the father of English learning"; but he is best and most deservedly known as the father of English history. It is not merely that we owe to him nearly all the knowledge that we certainly possess of the early history of the English kingdoms: many picturesque statements, much personal and political prejudice, would have been missing from the pages of history had later writers been careful to observe the conscientious and painstaking accuracy of Bede. On the other hand, numberless dry-as-dust volumes packed with useful information and sound philosophy, which are now reposing undisturbed on the topmost shelves of our libraries, and quite unknown to the general reader, would have revealed historic institutions and personalities in their true lineaments and proportions had their writers been gifted with a tithe of that knowledge of humanity, that faculty of the *raconteur*, that literary skill possessed by the monk of Jarrow.

Where the history of Northumbria was

¹ Some forty separate works are usually included in the list of Bede's undoubted writings.

concerned, it was comparatively easy for Bede to collect and to sift information ; but, in the case of the other English kingdoms, he was compelled to rely largely on the help of the ecclesiastics resident in the various provinces. The Abbot Albinus of Canterbury, for example, furnished him with records of the history of Kent. Nothelm, a monk of London, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, actually undertook a search of the papal archives at Rome in order to find documents which might throw light upon the mission to England.

Our author is very discreet and reticent on occasion. He aims at telling the truth and nothing but the truth, but not always the whole truth. We would give much to know what he really thought about Wilfrid and his policy ; but not a word escapes him which reveals his own opinion concerning appeals to Rome, or concerning the questions in dispute between the bishop and the Northumbrian Court—"The same year a dissension broke out between King Egfrid and the most reverend prelate Wilfrid, who was driven from his see"—not a syllable

conveys Bede's views as to the rights of the case. About Wilfrid's imprisonment and banishment from Northumbria, after his first appeal to Rome, Bede says nothing. We have this bare remark: "On account of the King's enmity, he could not be received in his country or diocese." Evidently he has a prejudice against the man. He is not sparing of praise where it can safely be given: of Wilfrid the missionary he speaks in the highest terms, but as respecting Wilfrid the statesman there is silence. If only the same hand which drew such living portraits of the saintly Oswald and the saintly Oswin had left us a companion picture of Wilfrid, the great bishop would remain a mystery no longer.

Many and diverse are the qualities which distinguish Bede from the vast majority of medieval historians. If, as someone has said, "a feeling for language is characteristic of a great man of the world," we may certainly say for the writer of the letter to Egbert that his claim to political wisdom is not belied by want of literary skill. Bede expended as much loving care upon his phrasing as many

a fellow monk in after ages upon the carving of a capital or a miserere.¹ Unlike a later historian, Professor Freeman, who was not afraid to repeat the same word over and over again if thereby he could add lucidity to his meaning, Bede was at the utmost pains to obtain variety of expression. Sometimes his efforts have fallen little short of the ludicrous. Perhaps the crowning example of this ill-rewarded labour is to be found not indeed in the *Ecclesiastical History*, but in the little treatise *On Thunder*.² He gravely sets down the accepted theories about the meaning and effect of thunder, but is every whit as careful not to pledge his own authority in support of a series of somewhat startling presages and portents as he is in the case of the miracles recorded in his historical and

¹ It will be seen, therefore, that I have ventured to dissociate myself from the dictum of Sharon Turner who says (*History of the Anglo-Saxons*, iii. 383), "attentive only to his matter, he had little solicitude for the phrase in which he dressed it."

² v. Dr. Browne's *Venerable Bede*, ch. x.

It should be noted, however, that Mr. Plummer emphatically declares *On Thunder* to be spurious (v. Plummer's *Bede*, I. clviii.).

biographical writings. His book is, in fact, a brief collection of "the opinions of learned writers" upon a particular natural phenomenon. But just here is our author's difficulty. He feels it necessary continually to vary the description of his authorities. He cannot always be content with the simple parenthesis "as they say." The more startling the statement, the more eulogistic is his reference to those who are responsible for it. In one place he quotes "The traditions of subtle philosophers." In another "Wise men in their exceeding subtlety actively investigating the presages of events." In yet another "Philosophers of sagacious disposition who by intellectual study and great prudence have noted the presages of events." Here he quotes "the noble teachers who almost from the cradle have been fed and nourished on the breast of maternal philosophy." There "Philosophers who with practised knowledge according to the excessive order of their most sagacious disposition have attempted to discern by intellectual speculation the causes and presages of events."

But do not let us be unfair to Bede. If at

rare intervals he verges on the ludicrous, not seldom he attains the sublime. No reader of the *Ecclesiastical History* can fail to remark and admire that haunting felicity of expression which sometimes soars into the region of genuine eloquence, as when it is said of Pope Gregory the Great: "Though he be not an apostle to others, yet he is so to us, for we are the seal of his apostleship in the Lord,"¹ or again, of the inspired cowherd of Whitby: "Others after him tried to compose religious poems but none could vie with him, for he learned the art of poetry not from men or of men but from God."² Sometimes we come across a terse and thrilling sentence, modern in its thought and turn of phrase, if we may so speak of what after all is written in Latin. After telling of Oswald's relationship by blood to Edwin, Bede stops to observe: "It was fitting that so great a predecessor should have in his own family so great a person to succeed him in his religion and sovereignty."³ Sometimes he is almost more than modern, too, in the

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* ii. 1.

² *Eccl. Hist.* iv. 24

³ *Eccl. Hist.* iii. 6.

touches of dry humour which are scattered over his pages. He introduces, for example, a phrase of quite intentional sarcasm in his account of Edwin's marriage. Paulinus, as you know, accompanied the Kentish princess to Northumbria. Bede does not openly pity Edwin for having to espouse the bishop at the same time as the lady, but he does say "Paulinus came to King Edwin with the aforesaid virgin as a companion of their union in the flesh!"¹ Again, when Colman of Lindisfarne, with certain of his monks, the dauntless representatives of a lost cause, left Northumbria after the Conference at Whitby, he returned to Ireland and built a monastery, but his troubles were not yet over. Englishmen even in those early days failed to appreciate the happy irresponsibility of the Irish temperament. Bede describes the situation with a sarcastic brevity more expressive than many adjectives. "The brethren," he writes, "could not agree, inasmuch as the Irishmen used to leave the monastery when harvest work had to be done and roam about in places well known to them, but would

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* ii. 9.

return in the winter and propose to share with the Englishmen what the latter had gathered in!"¹

These lectures have already afforded proof of Bede's gifts as a *raconteur*. Here surely he has few rivals. The story of Gregory and the slaves, of Edwin at the Court of East Anglia, of the Witan at Goodmanham, of the humility of Oswin, of the call of Caedmon,—these and many other imperishable stories we owe to this monk of Tyneside.

True that he had a grand tale to tell, but it is sad to reflect how many grand tales have been spoiled in the telling and how many more have never emerged from obscurity for want of a man with the genius and the industry worthily to narrate them. Bede made the most of his theme and his material. To him was given the judgment to identify and the heart to appreciate great men and noble deeds, and so to tell of them as to confer upon them an undying charm. And Bede the biographer, as might be expected, is no unworthy companion of Bede the historian.

Already in my second lecture I have had

¹ *Eccl. Hist.* iv. 4.

frequent occasion to refer to the *Life of Cuthbert*. This is, perhaps, the least valuable of our author's contributions to the story of his time. Its merits are chiefly to be attributed to an anonymous biographer whose work Bede calmly appropriates, and when on rare occasions he ventures to alter or to add it cannot be said that he improves upon the original. But there is another biography, brief indeed and less known than the *Life of Cuthbert*, which claims even more than the passing reference which can alone be accorded here. Short as it is, all the leading characteristics of the history are to be found, and in an even more delightful form, on the picturesque and inspiring pages called *The Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*. That reader must be cold indeed whose enthusiasm for art and learning is not quickened by the story of Benedict Biscop, who would refuse to share Bede's love and admiration for the handsome and kindly and humble Eosterwini, who would fail to reverence the aged and saintly Ceolfrid.

Here, too, is narrated an incident of the last days of Benedict and of his colleague

Sigfrid, the Abbot of Wearmouth, than which in all the annals of friendship few scenes more touching can be found. It is simply told without one needless syllable of rhetorical embroidery. But let the biographer speak for himself :

“ Now both the Abbots saw that they were near to death . . . their weakness was so great that when they expressed a desire to see one another before they died, and Sigfrid was brought in a litter into the room where Benedict was lying on his bed, though they were placed by the attendants with their heads on the same pillow, they had not the power of their own strength to kiss one another, but were assisted even in this act of fraternal love.”

Whether this scene has ever been represented on canvas, I know not, but surely it is not undeserving the brush of the greatest of painters.

I sometimes wonder what Benedict would say if he could revisit the site of his foundation at Monkwearmouth. But for the stones most precious of the church itself, he might well suppose that his life-long zeal for the beautiful

had left no trace and excited no response. In few quarters of our great towns have the efforts of the nineteenth century for the promotion of ugliness been attended with more unqualified success. Here if anywhere, where the monotonous streets of dismal dwellings slope down to the polluted river, even the most progressive of mankind looking upon the present and reflecting on the past might be inclined to intermit his cherished contempt for the *laudator temporis acti*.

The late John Bright, in his terse and unforgettable way, once publicly observed of a certain document—"What is old is good, what is new is poor." That is a remark which might well be applied to the desecrated precincts of St. Peter's at Monkwearmouth.

But the lover of Bede may yet find consolation in the treasures of memory. He may rebuild the monastery and clothe the banks with green. With all the brethren of Wearmouth and many from her sister of Jarrow, he may see the venerable Ceolfrid standing on the steps of the altar and hear him for the last time within those hallowed walls pronounce the words of blessing. He may watch

the sad procession pacing slowly to the river-side, may enter the boat with the monks who bear the lighted candles and the golden cross, may follow the loved form of the departing abbot as, taking his final leave of the house and the brethren he had served so long, he gains the opposite bank, mounts his horse, and slowly rides away.

Yes, it is a beautiful and noble story, that of the early Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow, and assuredly it was most "fitting," if I may parody a phrase already quoted, that churchmen so worthy should find within their own monastery so worthy a person to chronicle their thoughts and deeds.

But, in addition to all these graces and gifts of genius which I have already enumerated, Bede possessed in a degree seldom equalled one of the rarest and most valuable of all mental endowments. Beyond question a man of definite and strong conviction, yet breadth and balance of mind and admirable tolerance of spirit illumine the pages of all his writings—history, theology and science alike. This all-pervading sanity and good sense has made of Bede not only a veritable pioneer

of scientific research, but has given him an equally indisputable claim to rank among the forerunners of political and religious toleration.

Bede's science was not, I fear, of that practical character which would commend it to his hard-headed successors on Tyneside, but it is by no means to be despised. Such as it was, it was far in advance of his time, and this by reason not of any profound or exceptional knowledge, still less by any faculty of practical invention—it was the simple result of a sane and balanced and philosophic mind. The same instinct which, as we shall see, prompts him in his historical or biographical writings to hesitate before accepting the miraculous, leads him to ascribe natural phenomena to the laws of nature. His chief scientific work, the *De Natura Rerum*, deals in its fifty chapters with a great variety of topics ;—the signs of the Zodiac and the creation of the world, air and clouds, rain and snow, earthquake and pestilence, the Red Sea and the eruptions of Etna. Of course, there are errors and crudities not a few ; this is to be expected. A Newton or a Linnaeus

could not have avoided them had he lived in the eighth century. Bede gravely asserts that the stars borrow their light from the sun and that rain is due to the compression of clouds by the air, yet he is at least popularly correct when he says that thunder and lightning are the collisions of the clouds and that pestilence is produced from the air either by excess of dryness or of heat or of moisture ; and he speaks, of course, with perfect accuracy when he states that the tides of the ocean follow the moon.

Bede's scientific studies were by no means confined to the phenomena of nature. He discoursed, for example, on the rules of metre, on spelling and on music. Among the countless devotees of music many may have surpassed him in skill, but few in appreciation. When Bede speaks of music he talks in superlatives. It may, perhaps, be objected that there is little trace of moderation here ; but after all, if we are to believe his own statement, the source of his admiration, the sum and substance of his most enthusiastic eulogy, amounts to little more than this, that music contributes in a unique

degree to the development and retention of a sound and well-balanced mind. "Among all the sciences," he writes, "music is most commendable, courtly, pleasing, mirthful, and lovely. It makes a man liberal, cheerful, courteous, glad, amiable; it rouses him to battle; it exhorts him to bear fatigue; it comforts him under labour; it refreshes the disturbed mind; it takes away headaches and sorrow, and dispels the depraved humours and the despondent spirit."

But the qualities of moderation and good sense are no whit more prominent in his scientific than in his historical and theological work. Monk as he was, he does not over-emphasise the monastic virtues. He observes the golden mean, is always conspicuously sane. Constancy and virginity, he says, are good, but those who forbid marriage are blameworthy.¹ The contemplative life is the better part, but it is not to be dissevered from the practical.² In Bede's Christianity there is room for both a Martha and a Mary.

"It is safer not to possess riches, but it is

¹ Plummer, ii. 54.

² Plummer, ii. 68.

the loving them, not the having them, that is sinful. The Psalmist did not say 'If riches increase, do not receive them,' but 'if riches increase, do not set your heart upon them.' " Again : " To forsake all things for Christ is the privilege of only the few." ¹

Notwithstanding the fact that he is writing an ecclesiastical history, Bede records no miracles on his own authority,² and those he does relate are always introduced or accompanied by a statement of sources and by qualifying expressions. Here is a typical example of such a preface :

" In this Monastery (Selsey) certain manifestations of the Heavenly Grace are '*said*' to have been shown forth . . . of which number I have thought proper to perpetuate the memory of one which the most reverend Bishop Acca was wont to relate to me, '*affirming*' it had been told him by the most reliable brethren of the same Monastery." ³

¹ Plummer, I. lxix. and lxx.

² The above statement is literally true with respect to all his prose works ; but the metrical *Life of Cuthbert* contains one exception to this rule.

³ *Eccl. Hist.* iv. 14.

Diversity of opinion did not blind his eyes to the merits of those from whom he differed ; witness the sincere praise which this champion of Rome bestows upon the virtues of Aidan and Colman, and the church which they adorned. Words of wisdom, whose force and truth the centuries have not impaired, are dotted like stars over the firmament of Bede's writings. He blames the ascetic for intentional disregard of taste and comfort in the matter of attire, just as much as he blames the vain and prodigal for the splendour of their clothing. It is significant of Bede's general attitude of mind that in his *Life of Cuthbert* he comments with approval upon the saint's dress as "neither conspicuously neat nor conspicuously sordid."¹ "Though we should give to everyone that asketh," he quaintly says, "it does not follow that we should give him what he asks." "For there is a weak kind of compassion which amounts to sympathy with crime and merely encourages wrong doing." Bede's moderation would scarcely have stood the test of "Jack Shepherd" or "Arsène Lupin" !

¹ Plummer, I. lxx.

But good sense is elevated into statesmanship when it assumes the form of such an epistle as that which the monk of Jarrow addresses to the Archbishop of York. Here, in this letter to Egbert, Bede gives convincing proof that despite his cloistered life, remote from war and political intrigue, he yet possessed the capacity and the courage of a genuine statesman. It is a marvellous production for his age and country; marvellous for its religious zeal, and, at the same time, for its breadth of view, its insight, its independence. He is not afraid of plain speaking. He exhorts Egbert to avoid gossip and bad company, "for there are bishops who, instead of surrounding themselves with religious and just persons, are accompanied only by buffoons and drunkards who take more thought how to fill their bellies than satisfy their souls."¹ And again, "Beware, dear bishop, . . . of those who

¹The Bishop of Bristol, a patriotic Northumbrian, thinks it probable that Bede's remark had special reference to the bishops "of the parts which we now know as the Southern Province!" (v. *Alcuin of York*, p. 56).

think only of drawing earthly lucre from their ministry. It is said there are many villages situated in our Northumbria in remote hills or woods never visited by a bishop and yet paying bishop's dues."

Bede clearly suggested the establishment, according to Pope Gregory's original plan, of the archbishopric of York and the institution of suffragan bishops. And furthermore, this monk had the audacity to anticipate Henry VIII., to advise an out-and-out confiscation of monastic lands in order to support the new dignities. He is not sparing in his denunciation of his monastic brethren. "There are vast and numerous establishments which are of use for nothing, neither for the service of God or man. He who would make them into new bishoprics would be neither a usurper nor a prevaricator. He would do a work of salvation and an act of virtue." He speaks openly of "the carelessness of the old Kings and their foolish liberality," who gave so much land to the Church that nothing remains wherewith to reward nobles and warriors. "You must prevent the devil," he said, "from substi-

tuting in places sacred to God discord for peace, drunkenness for abstinence, debauchery and murder for chastity and charity." "I know well that my exhortations will meet many gainsayers, especially among those who are the authors or accomplices of the excesses I complain of, but you must treat with apostolic vigour these miserable successors of Ananias and Sapphira"; and he ends by urging Egbert to dissipate the senseless illusion of those who think that death-bed generosity can redeem unworthy lives—"the hand that gives to God must be like the conscience, free from all grime and soil."

I have ventured to make these quotations from the letter to Egbert, because they illustrate a phase of Bede's character often ignored. They afford abundant evidence, if there is yet need of evidence, that the saint and scholar may also possess a sound and practical judgment upon mundane matters, a real grasp of public affairs.

Bede's merits, therefore, are many and conspicuous. His defects, or what we consider such, they are the defects of his age,

but his merits are largely his own. The whole purpose of Bede's life, the spirit which inspired his work, his conscientiousness, his industry, his zeal, his love, find supreme expression in that story of his last days, written by one of his scholars and handed down to us by Simeon of Durham.¹ For two weeks the master's strength had gradually failed, and it was evident that the end was near. Teacher and pupils mingled their tears, but the work still went on. Bede was anxious to conclude his translation into English of the Gospel of St. John and his selections from Bishop Isidore. "I do not wish my scholars to read what is untrue and to labour unprofitably when I am gone." He distributed among them his little possessions. "Trifling ones, indeed," he said, "but such as God has given me." "Dear master," said a boy, "there is still one more sentence which has not been written out." He replied, "Write it quickly." "Now at last it is finished," said the lad. "You have spoken truly," Bede answered, "all is finished." And

¹ v. "Simeon of Durham," *Church Historians of England*, 646-9.

so, with head supported by his scholars' arms, amid the chant of the Gloria Patri, the passing of this great saint and teacher was in 735 fitting and beautiful accord with his work and aspiration of sixty years. "To England and to its historic race" he has bequeathed—I quote Montalembert—"the finest monument of national history which any modern people has received from its fathers." And it may with truth, I think, be said that to this priceless gift he has added yet another of equal or of greater value, the noble and inspiring memory of his personal example.

Born in the very year of the death of Bede,¹ Alcuin of York, alike in mental characteristics and in the scope and method of his literary work, closely resembles the great master of whom he was the intellectual heir; but in the outward circumstances of their lives the contrast was great indeed. Alcuin's seventy years were spent in no quiet backwater of learning. More than half

Alcuin.
735-804

¹ The year 735 is the traditional year of Bede's death; but other dates are sometimes assigned (*v.* Plummer, I. lxxi. note).

his life was passed in this city at a time when York was the metropolis of a State rapidly drifting into anarchy. Even the scholastic calm of its school and library must at times have been ruffled by the tempest of civil strife, and Alcuin, student and teacher though he was, must have been an unwilling witness of many a stormy scene. Then suddenly he was launched into the full tide of European advance. A sound judgment upon public affairs was the common possession of Bede and Alcuin, but the chance of reducing theory into practice, denied to the cloistered recluse of Jarrow, was happily granted to his successor. Minister and counsellor of the greatest ruler of his time, this Bede reincarnated helped to mould the politics of the world. Little is known of his parentage. Although descended from a noble and wealthy Northumbrian family, it is doubtful whether he was Northumbrian born. Some say that York was his birthplace, others prefer the claims of London. One biographer, a Frenchman, with laudable eagerness to omit no illuminating detail of importance, explains that "London in York-

shire" was Alcuin's native town!¹ Be this as it may, there is no doubt that from early boyhood Alcuin was enrolled as a pupil of the great school which Egbert, Bede's favourite disciple, had established in York. His love of your city finds abundant and happy expression in his poem on *The Bishops and Saints of the Church of York*. He recalls with pride and pleasure its stately buildings, its beautiful fields, its river teeming with fish—

Hanc piscosa suis undis interluit Usa.

Here in this little oasis of learning and peace Alcuin spent two-score happy years. Without was disorder, a kingdom "flooded with crime." Assassination may be said to have flourished. During a period of less than fifty years, ten kings reigned in unhappy Northumbria. "Murdered," "deprived," "banished," "expelled," "murdered," "deposed," "killed," "expelled," "expelled,"—such is the recorded end of nine consecutive rulers. The ecclesiastical evils deplored by Bede continued and increased. Her

¹ Feller, *Biographie Universelle*—Alcuin; and v. Gaskoin's *Alcuin*, 41 note.

great kings and churchmen now no more, the State was lapsing into barbarism; but within the precincts of the cathedral school was calm, order, system. "Education was organized at York as in England, perhaps, it had never been organized before."¹ York stood, indeed, for Roman orthodoxy, for the Latin custom and rule championed by Wilfrid. All its traditions were Roman. Gregory, Augustine of Canterbury, Benedict Biscop, Cuthbert and Bede, were looked upon by its masters as their predecessors. Nevertheless, something of the liberal spirit of St. Augustine of Hippo at his best seems to have pervaded the Northumbrian school. It is true that the text-books chosen were the writings of such scholars as Boethius or Cassiodorus or Isidore, which were not calculated to sap any young man's orthodoxy. Throughout the Middle Ages the seven liberal arts² which formed the sum and substance of education, were too often regarded merely as so many helps to the study of

¹ Gaskoin's *Alcuin*, 34.

² Grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy.

theology, so many weapons for ecclesiastical hands ; but, consciously or unconsciously, the enthusiasm of York transcended utilitarian ideals. Although the needs of the Church were seldom absent from the teacher's mind, yet there is evidence that the various subjects of study, the grammar and rhetoric, the music and astronomy, were taught and valued for their own sake. " Let every good and true Christian know that truth is the truth of his Lord and Master wherever it be found"—so wrote the fearless Augustine ; and it is the glory of York that centuries before the time of Abelard this wise and beautiful precept of the great African doctor found an echo in its cathedral school. Perhaps we may in measure attribute this happy circumstance to the lingering influence of that Celtic tradition which was " weakened but not destroyed " by the decision of Whitby. Orthodox and Roman as it was in matters of theology, York did not close its doors to the wider and more speculative learning of Ireland. By its breadth of culture, not less than by the excellence of its teaching or by the possession of its unique and splendid

library, scholars from every part of England and even from across the seas were attracted to the Northumbrian school. Its founder and first master, Egbert, Archbishop of York, was aided in the work of teaching and management by his kinsman Albert—that silent worker—*non ore loquax, sed strenuus actu*¹—who eventually succeeded him in the archbishopric. These were the men whose learning and enthusiasm quickened and inspired the life of Alcuin.

Neither in medieval nor modern times has this city been selected as the site of a university, but, if a great historic past and a great tradition of learning are qualifications for a university town, few cities in Europe have claims that are comparable to those of York.

c. 745-782 As pupil and master, Alcuin—as I have said—spent nearly forty years in York. No exception, therefore, can be taken to his inclusion among the worthies of Northumbria, though his lasting fame was gained on other fields. Even if we admit the claim of St. Peter's School to be the representative and

¹ *v.* Alcuin's poem on *The Bishops and Saints of York*.

lineal descendant of the eighth century scholastic foundation, Alcuin still remains its most famous old scholar. It would not be just to make an exception even in favour of Guy Fawkes, whose name, as I understand from my friend, the headmaster of St. Peter's, is still sacrosanct in the school which he adorned!

During these years of quiet usefulness, Alcuin's reputation as a teacher was constantly growing. On three occasions the monotony of his life was broken by visits to the Continent, and the last of these journeys not only marks an epoch in his own career, but perhaps it is not too much to say in the history of European civilisation ; for at Parma he came into contact with Charles the Great, 781 and received from the Frankish king an urgent invitation to enter his service. You will not expect me to speak at length upon this the most famous name of all the Middle Ages. The heroic figure of "Charlemagne," his character and achievements, concern us only in so far as they influence or are influenced by the humbler personality of the Northumbrian scholar. Charles had not yet

assumed the Imperial crown when he met Alcuin at Parma. But as king of the Franks and the Lombards, his rule already extended from the Elbe to Calabria. He was now nearly forty years old, in the full force of his amazing physical and mental energy. Ambition, missionary zeal, the necessity for providing a scientific frontier for his vast dominion, these and many other reasons had made of Charles' reign one unbroken series of wars. Already he had accomplished many of the great deeds which are celebrated in the Charlemagne Epic. Already the successful siege of Pavia had brought about the downfall of the Lombard monarchy. "Roland" and "Oliver" had fallen in the Pass of Roncesvalles; in a series of campaigns, Charles had pierced the almost impenetrable forests of the Weser and the Elbe and had destroyed the Irminsul, the sacred symbol of Saxon unity; but war and its triumphs did not satisfy the many-sided character of Charles. Whatever may have been his military skill, it was far surpassed by his genius as a statesman and an organiser. In zeal for good government and for the pro-

motion of all the highest and most essential elements of modern civilisation, he has had few equals among the rulers of the world. He "created modern Europe," says one living historian; and another unhesitatingly assigns him "a foremost place among the benefactors of humanity." Charles himself in early life was untrained in letters, but no one was more profoundly convinced of the advantages of learning. Not only did he wish to satisfy his own thirst for knowledge but to spread that knowledge broadcast among his people. One of Charles' rarest gifts was his skill in the choice of men, and it speaks highly for the monarch's penetration that he should immediately have discerned in the student and teacher of York, a man unversed in public affairs, to whom "strife and hurry were as smoke to sore eyes," the precise instrument which he needed for his vast educational designs. There can be no doubt that Alcuin on his side was profoundly impressed by the achievements and personality of that masterful ruler, concerning whom it has been said, "*il conquit aussi volontiers un savant qu'une ville.*" Reluctant as he

was to leave his native land, he could not but feel that the political condition of Northumbria threatened the very existence of the school of York. By the acceptance of Charles' flattering invitation he would go far to ensure, not merely personal safety, but the preservation of that ancient learning of which he was the custodian and embodiment. At the same time, the prospect of a far wider and more fruitful field of service than his native land could offer would not be without its inducements for a man whose zeal was unquenchable and whose vigour was still unabated.

The year 782, therefore, found Alcuin at Charles' court ready to take up the crowning work of his life.

But do not let us suppose for one moment that because his continuous connection with England was severed, her interests ceased to be his or that he was lacking in genuine patriotism. Only in response to what he regarded as the imperative calls of a higher duty did he surrender the hope of eventually returning to York. He neglected no opportunity which his great position gave him,

either of promoting the welfare of his native land or of doing a kindness to any of her sons. "Never have I been unfaithful to the people of Britain," he could truly and proudly say. Twice at least he paid long visits to England on errands of reconciliation. By rebuke, by exhortation, he endeavoured vainly to restore political order in Northumbria.

"I therefore, comrades most dear"—he writes to King Ethelred and his Witan—"do not cease from admonishing you, you who are citizens of the same fatherland... with respect to the things which pertain to the safety of this earthly realm and to the blessedness of the heavenly home.... For what is love to a friend if it keeps silence on matters useful to a friend? To what does a man owe fidelity if not to his country?... What shall I say of avarice, rapine and judicial violence?... For sins of this nature Kings lose kingdoms and peoples their fatherland."¹

He does not mince matters when he writes to King Ethelred, of whose personal guilt and insecurity of tenure Alcuin was well aware.

¹ *v.* Browne's *Alcuin of York*, pp. 128-46 ; and Jaffé, *Ep.* 22.

“No man is free or noble who is the slave of sin. It becometh not thee, seated on the throne of the kingdom, to live like common men. Anger should not be lord over thee but reason. . . . Be to thine own self conscious of chasteness, not of lust—of sobriety, not of drunkenness. . . . Fear God, who has said, ‘With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.’”¹

It was in 792 that the Danes destroyed the Church of Lindisfarne, and we find Alcuin sending words of encouragement to the surviving brethren and to the monks of Wearmouth and Jarrow.

“Ye that survive, stand like men. Call back your patrons who have left you for a time. Bear in mind the nobleness of your fathers, be not degenerate sons.”²

Alcuin, in a letter to Queen Etheldryth, speaks of that royal lady’s “faithful love,” which “neither distance by land nor the stormy wave of tidal sea”³ could lessen or disturb. Might not the self-same words be applied with equal, if not with greater, truth to the deep and enduring attachment

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 42.

² Jaffé, *Ep.* 24 and *Ep.* 27.

³ Jaffé, *Ep.* 50.

cherished by Alcuin for his beloved Northumbria? And not Northumbria only engaged his attention and called forth his sympathy. He successfully negotiated a peace between Offa of Mercia, then the most powerful potentate in Britain, and the offended Charles. We can have no doubt that his influence as ecclesiastical representative of Northumbria helped to moderate the heat of faction and the jealousy of rival States and prelates, when, in the "contentious synod of Chelsea, the ambitious Mercian king carried his revolutionary scheme for the creation of a new Archbishopric in his midland realm." During the last years of his life when, as Abbot of St. Martin's at Tours, Alcuin presided over the richest monastery in all Charles' dominion, his responsibility was too great, and perhaps his physical frame too feeble, to permit of his crossing the sea; but his letters still displayed undiminished interest in English affairs. Advice, rebuke, encouragement, flow from his pen. He shows himself the veritable St. Bernard of his time.

Even Bede is not more zealous than Alcuin for the purity and efficiency of the English

Church, and the one is as plain-spoken as the other. Alcuin entertains Archbishop Æthelhard of Canterbury, but at the same time adjures him not to scandalise the Frankish court by the luxury of his apparel! "Stand with your loins girt in the armour of Christ and your lights burning,"¹ he writes to the prelates of Britain. Again: "Your mouth must be the trumpet of Christ." . . . "The episcopal honour is no secular play."² That Alcuin knew well the peculiar dangers and temptations likely in those days to beset an archbishop is shown by his letters to "his best-loved son in Christ," Eanbald (II.) of York.

"Now, then, act as a man and a strong man. Let not your tongue cease from preaching nor your foot from going about among the flock committed to you. . . . Let not the pomp of the world lift thee up, nor luxury of food enervate thee, nor the vanity of vestures make thee soft, nor the tongues of flatterers deceive thee, nor the gainsaying of detractors disturb thee, nor troubles break thee, nor joys lift thee up. . . . Not every friend is fit to be an adviser. The Scripture says: 'Be not covetous of gold and of silver,

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 61.

² Jaffé, *Ep.* 230.

but of gain of souls. . . . Let not your mind become soft in adulation of princes or slow in correction of those under you. Be a very firm pillar in the House of God, not a reed shaken with the wind.”¹

There is evidence, too, of pleasant and by no means infrequent interchange of favours between York and Tours. Alcuin makes a present to Archbishop Eanbald of York of wine, and of 100 lbs. of lead wherewith to cover the bell tower of his cathedral church. We find him sending for books from the library of his old school, that “the flowers of York might bloom on the banks of Loire.”² So far, indeed, did he carry his partiality for his fellow-countrymen as to excite no small jealousy in the hearts of the good monks at Tours. “Here is another Briton or Irishman come to see the Briton inside,” exclaimed a grumbling monk. “The Lord deliver this monastery from the British, for they swarm hither like bees to their hive.”

Alcuin died and was buried in remote

¹ v. Browne's *Alcuin of York*, pp. 164-7 ; and Jaffé, *Epp.* 72, 73, 74.

² Jaffé, *Epp.* 78.

Touraine, but to the end he lived and acted in the spirit of the loving words which he addressed to his old friends at York on the eve of his departure for Tours: "My Fathers and brethren," he wrote, "dearer than all else in the world, pray do not forget me, for alike in life and death I shall ever be yours."¹

782-796 But between the time of his acceptance of Charles' invitation and that of his semi-retirement to the Abbey of St. Martin's fourteen years intervened, the busiest years of Alcuin's life and the most important for posterity. During the whole of this period he acted as Minister of Education and confidential adviser to the greatest monarch in Europe. What were his qualifications for this great position, and how far did he redeem the trust which was placed in him by Charles? Already, indeed, the English scholar had given abundant proof of the possession of certain fundamentals essential to his new position. An astute observer like Charles could not well fail to recognise the zeal and industry, the learning and power of lucid exposition, above all, perhaps, the broad humanity which

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 34.

had done so much to make of York the most famous school in Christendom. I say advisedly the broad humanity, for although we have reason to believe that Alcuin was a strict master, and would have been very likely, had he lived in these days, to have included cricket and football among those "silly plays"¹ (*inanes ludos*) which he was careful to discourage, yet we know beyond doubt from his poems and letters that he was a man who rejoiced in open-air pursuits, who breathed the very spirit of the woods and fields. He was a keen angler: not only the Yorkshire Ouse, but the Meuse and the Loire witnessed, one or both of them, his piscatorial triumphs.

His letters abound in examples of genial and playful humour, in any man a saving grace, but to none more essential than the over-harassed schoolmaster. He writes, for example, in old age to Riculf, Archbishop of Mainz, who had made him a present of an ivory comb:

"I greatly rejoice in your welfare and am much delighted with your loving present,

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 72.

sending you as many thanks as I have counted teeth in your gift. It is a wonderful animal with two heads, and with sixty teeth, not of elephantine size but of the beauty of ivory. I am not terrified by the horror of this beast, but delighted by its appearance; I have no fear of its biting me with gnashing teeth. I am pleased with its fawning caresses, which smooth the hair of my head. I see not ferocity in its teeth; I see only the love of the sender."¹

That the altruism reflected in so many of Alcuin's words and deeds was in no sense a bar to the intensest personal and individual love is proved by his frequent and affectionate correspondence with his friend, Bishop Arno of Salzburg, whose "most sweet face" he was ever longing to see.²

In scholarship, though perhaps without rival in his own day, Alcuin was by no means the equal of Bede. His knowledge either of Greek or Hebrew was but scanty. His acquaintance with Latin literature was confined to the authors, between forty and fifty in number, whom we know to have been represented in the library at York, and of

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 9.

² Jaffé, *Ep.* 127.

some of these it may be said that only by polite convention can such a term as "literature" be applied to the result of their labours. However, Cicero and Virgil, Pliny and Lucan were there.¹ From such masters as these Alcuin borrowed his enthusiasm, and upon them he based his style. For the youthful student the fascination of Virgil was such that nothing less formidable than the visit of an evil spirit was needed to drag him from the nocturnal perusal of the *Aeneid* to the repetition of the appointed psalms. There can be little doubt that Alcuin, in his early days, shared the prevailing opinion of York, that the arts were worthy of study for their own sakes alone. Perhaps in old age his views on education changed. Physical debility may have weaned him from earthly things. Tours may have infected him with something of the then prevailing monastic fanaticism. A somewhat dubious tradition supports this theory. It is related that he sternly forbade the reading of Virgil, and

¹ Possibly, as has been suggested, Alcuin's list, dependent as it was on the exigencies of his metre, does scant justice to the York library.

pointed out to his pupils that the study of the Bible was all sufficient.

“Oh, that the four Gospels and not the twelve *Æneads* (*sic*) might fill your thoughts,”¹ he writes to the Archbishop of Trèves. But this last might well be looked upon as a pious ejaculation merely. And it may be added that more than one writer remains unconvinced that Alcuin really placed Virgil on the index expurgatorius of Tours. But for my own part, I prefer to believe that the tale had a basis of fact, and that in all likelihood Alcuin, when rebuking a pupil who shared his own youthful peculiarities, was tempted, like many another and humbler teacher, to say a little more than he meant, never suspecting that his remarks would be quoted against him after 1200 years. Even in his last days at Tours we find him, in one of his letters to Charles, describing with loving wealth of detail the wide range of instruction imparted at the Abbey School. “To some I give the honey of the Scriptures; others I set myself to nourish upon the fruit of grammatical subtlety. Now and then I intoxicate a

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 216.

student with the wine of the ancient sciences, and a few I dazzle with the brightness and fixed order of the stars.”¹ As will be perceived, the subjects here enumerated are not religious only but secular, and Alcuin’s most enthusiastic phrases are reserved for the secular.

It is true that in the famous capitulary of 787, which more than any other embodies Charles’ educational policy, a document in all probability drawn up by the hand of Alcuin himself, the study of letters is encouraged and vindicated expressly on the ground that it would tend to the better understanding of the Holy Scripture ; but even here, and still more in the case of other and similar capitularies of Charles, it is possible to read between the lines a broader, and, as we should consider, a more enlightened view. I cannot doubt that his early and pure enthusiasm for knowledge continued to be the delight and inspiration of Alcuin’s life. He cherished his ideals in fear and trembling, perhaps, for he was the most conservative of mankind, but he never let them go. This, indeed, is of the

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 78.

very essence of that grand legislation which has inseparably linked the names of Charles and Alcuin for all time to come.

The orthodox attitude of mind is reflected with unconscious humour by Alcuin's most famous pupil, Rabanus Maurus, who dryly remarks concerning the art of geometry, "A consideration which makes it acceptable to a Christian is that it was used in building the Tabernacle and the Temple." Many a modern school-boy would doubtless substitute the definite for the indefinite article and write, "*The* only consideration"! But contrast this narrow and unworthy utterance with the broader and more human sentiment of the master himself as he appreciatively describes the calm joys which accompany the study and knowledge of mathematics: "Thou knowest well," he writes to Charles, "how agreeable a study is arithmetic, how necessary it is for understanding the Holy Scriptures, and how pleasant is the knowledge of the heavenly bodies and their courses."¹

In my view, then, Alcuin was a man within

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 99.

whose breast orthodoxy was ever struggling against personal taste and individual conviction. Here is the clue to all his inconsistencies. As life advanced, the power and perhaps the inclination to resist the growing tendencies of the age became less and less, but he never entirely discarded his early and high ideals.

Perhaps if we try to formulate in one word the great underlying, impelling motive of Alcuin's life, we may describe it as a consuming zeal for the preservation of the ancient learning. "My master (Albert)¹ used often to say to me that it was the wisest of men who discovered the Arts and it would be a great disgrace to allow them to perish in our day,"² so Alcuin wrote to Charles. Again, he stimulated his copyists at Tours in words which were affixed to the entrance of the Scriptorium: "It is a noble work to write out Holy books. . . . He who writes a book saves his soul." So great a store did Alcuin

¹ West's *Alcuin*, 37. West here speaks of "Egbert," but surely Duemmler is right in supposing that the reference is to Albert.

² Jaffé, *Ep.* 99.

set upon the ancient wisdom, so little did he hope from the ages to come, that his literary labours were almost entirely devoted to the eulogy and the reproduction of what had been said and taught by the Fathers.¹ His multitudinous prose writings contained scarcely a single original thought.²

¹ *v.* Gaskoin's *Alcuin*, ch. ix.

² Of Alcuin's Biblical commentaries, that on Ecclesiastes is based on Jerome, as also is that on "The Sayings of St. Paul"; that on the Apocalypse reproduces Bede; the treatise on St. Paul's Epistles is compiled from Chrysostom. Much of his controversial work is similarly borrowed from the Fathers, and, in respect of all his theological writings, Alcuin accurately describes his attitude and practice in letters addressed to two ladies of the Imperial family (the immediate reference is to the Commentary on the Epistle of St. John):

"I have reverently traversed the storehouses of the early Fathers and whatever I have been able to find there, I have sent for you to taste . . . for I have preferred to employ their thoughts and words rather than to venture anything of my own audacity" (Jaffé, *Épp.* 136 and 159).

And what is true of the theological is true also of the more strictly educational works of Alcuin. About his *Grammar* there is "little that is singular except its form and its mistakes." Its substance is drawn chiefly from Donatus, and, when the amazed reader stumbles across

No greater tributes could be paid to Alcuin's personality and skill as a teacher than to say that they appear to have triumphed

a remark or definition that relieves the unspeakable dulness of its pages, he finds it is taken from Isidore. The *Grammar* has been criticised on the ground that it includes neither orthography, syntax, nor prosody. This, on the contrary, seems to me its only merit. But Alcuin has not spared us the "orthography." To this subject he devotes another volume, which probably afforded useful guidance for his copyists at Tours. And certainly bachelors can forgive the writer much for his definition, whether original or not, of "coelebs" as "one who is on his way ad coelum" (to heaven)! The Dialogue on "Rhetoric and the Virtues" is a feeble combination of Cicero, Aristotle, and the Holy Scriptures. And, as a recent writer has said, it "fails to attain even the low level of interest reached by the *Grammar*." To continue the enumeration would be tedious and useless.

Despite occasional and apparently unconscious lapses into humour, it is not possible for the mind to conceive of books more utterly insipid and tiresome. Some explanation is occasionally offered by modern apologists of Alcuin. They suggest that his writings are so puerile because only thus could he make successful appeal to the childish capacity of his readers. This is ingenious but unconvincing; still, it seems the most plausible explanation of the intellectual feebleness of books whose chief, if not sole, merit lies in the fact that they "gave to Western Europe imperfectly understood fragments of the wisdom of the Ancients."

even over the dulness of his text-books, and the pity of it is that the dulness is all so unnecessary. If even for an hour Alcuin had permitted himself, as in his private letters, to express his own thoughts in his own way, many a gleam of humanity and light would have been shed over these sombre pages by this sympathetic and radiant spirit. Truly, if the world has gained immensely by his sustained and successful efforts to preserve the old knowledge for future generations, it is difficult to estimate how much it has lost by reason of Alcuin's most unfortunate and uncalled-for self-effacement produced by too exclusive a worship at the ancient shrines. We may form some conception of the genuine poetic afflatus of this child of woodland Northumbria from a metrical version of his "Dialogue between Winter and Spring," which I venture to extract from the admirable monograph on *Charlemagne* by Mr. Carless Davis :

SPRING.

"I am fain for the Cuckoo's coming, the bird that I
love the best ;
And there's not a roof where the Cuckoo deigns to pause
in his flight and rest

And pipe glad songs from his ruddy beak, but will call
him a welcome guest."

WINTER.

"Delay me the coming of Cuckoo! the father of toils
is he;

And battles he brings, and all men in the world, however
weary they be,

Must rouse them from rest at his trumpet to brave land-
farings and perils at sea."

SPRING.

"The note of the Cuckoo brings flowers and gladdens
with honey the bee,

Sends the landsman to build up his homestead, the ship
to the unruffled sea,

And the nestlings are hatched by his music, and the
meadow glows green and the tree."

The prosody of the original may be such
as "would at times disgrace a fifth-form
schoolboy," but the spirit is that of Words-
worth and of Burns.

Although, indeed, Alcuin had written little
at the time of his departure for Charles'
Court, yet the great king must have been
well aware of the mental and moral charac-
teristics of the Northumbrian scholar; and
more than this, he must have gauged his
possibilities, and, with the eye of genius,
discerned through the outward shell the very

kernel and heart of the man to whom he issued his urgent invitation.

I have already hinted that there are two Alcuins: the pure unadulterated conservative, a mummy, swathed in the manifold wrappings of the ages of darkness which preceded him; and the natural, the human, modern Alcuin who, freed from the trammels of tradition, showed himself not only a poet and a lover of nature, a man of consummate tact and judgment, but abundantly able to rise to the height of his great opportunities, to act and think "imperially." It was this second Alcuin whom Charles discovered and upon whom he relied for help in his great educational schemes. Charles fought against ignorance with the same heroic tenacity that he displayed in his Saxon wars; but he had not the same intimate knowledge of the strategy required in this unfamiliar field. Here he needed an expert chief of the staff, and Alcuin proved himself the Moltke to Charles' William.

We cannot now penetrate behind the scenes and certainly say whether the educational ordinances of Charles were or were not

“suggested,” as Guizot asserts, by Alcuin himself, but that the pen which framed the ordinances was Alcuin’s pen seems beyond question. Moreover, it is not likely that the great monarch with all the cares of Europe on his shoulders could find time carefully to consider the details even of legislation which was so near his heart. Charles, of course, was the driving power, and there can be no doubt at all that the so-called Capitularies, even if initiated and framed by his “minister of education,” were in complete harmony with the king’s wishes and general policy.

When Alcuin came to Aachen, Western Europe was just emerging from a period of utter darkness. The famous historian of European civilisation declares that between the fall of the Roman Empire and our own days the human mind never sank so low as in the earlier part of the seventh century. Internal strife, external dangers, orthodox bigotry, had driven learning from the Continent to the islands of the West. Here and there, it is true, the Classics were still taught by solitary scholars whose zeal was admirable but whose information left something to be

desired. For, although they did not believe, like the modern schoolboy, that Caesar and Pompey were merely alternative names for the same person, we do read that they drew a marked distinction between Tullius and Cicero! So then, when Alcuin came, he found few helpers,—one or two grammarians, indeed, whom Charles had invited to his Court, but no organiser, no man of action, no one capable of devising a wise and statesman-like scheme of education for the Empire.

Alcuin's work falls naturally into two parts. By his own unremitting personal labours he re-lit the extinguished lamp of learning, and by the wisdom of his legislation he helped to diffuse its beams over all the wide dominions of Charles. The master of York was now transformed into the master of the Palace School. If ever there was a man who possessed every qualification of the born teacher it was Alcuin. But if even at York something more than this was advisable, at Aachen it was necessary. Learning and enthusiasm and lucidity were not enough; they must be supplemented by all the personal tact, the range of sympathy, the knowledge

of affairs possessed only by a perfect gentleman and man of the world. For consider the nature of his audience: a few boys of humble birth sat side by side with the sons of nobles, perhaps with Egbert, the youthful refugee from Wessex, who was to secure for his kingdom the permanent overlordship of England; certainly with many of the magnates of the Empire, with the councillors lay and ecclesiastical—Riculf the Archbishop of Mainz, and Rigbod the Archbishop of Trèves themselves were present, with the members male and female of the Imperial family, with the sons of Charles—his namesake who ruled over Neustria, Pippin the Viceroy of Lombardy, and Lewis the Viceroy of Aquitaine. And besides all these there was the great and eloquent Emperor, perhaps the most interested as he was certainly the most intelligent auditor of all. There never was so distinguished an adult school as this, and the method of teaching must assuredly have differed widely from that to which Alcuin had been accustomed at York.¹

¹ In making use of the terms "Emperor" and "Imperial" I am, of course, strictly anticipating, but we

The relation of teacher to pupil was no longer that of master to boy, but very much that of a University Extension Lecturer to his audience. And I imagine that Alcuin's procedure would not differ materially from our own. There would be an introductory address, and this would be followed by an informal conversation upon points of interest suggested by it. Probably questions poured in upon Alcuin at Aachen, as later at Tours "like insects in the summer through the open window,"¹ to borrow his own humorous phrase. We know that Charles delighted to question and to puzzle the master, and the queries propounded by the imperious monarch must at times have called for the exercise of the rarest ingenuity and tact; but Alcuin was equal to any emergency. On one occasion he had been dilating upon the immense learning of Augustine and Jerome, when Charles hastily interposed: "Why cannot I have twelve clerks like these?" The

always think and speak of Charles as Emperor, and at this period the power and influence were his—the title only was lacking.

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 96.

astonished but discreet master was ready with his reply : "What," he exclaimed, "the Lord of heaven and earth had but two such and would'st thou have twelve?"¹

Social difficulties would in part be obviated by the assumption, not perhaps with this end in view, of classical or scriptural names on the part of teacher and scholar. Alcuin was addressed as Albinus; Pippin as Julius; Rotrud (Charles' daughter) was Columba; and Charles himself was David, "a name admirably chosen to express his piety, his success in war, and his love of women."²

We may be sure, however, that the corrections and rebukes administered by the courtier-schoolmaster would be couched in language of unexceptional politeness. Can

¹ Alcuin was not the only scholar who got the better of Charles in repartee: witness an anecdote of the famous Scot (Irishman), John Erigena, who, when dining with Charles, was rebuked—no doubt deservedly—by the emperor for some lapse of good manners.

"What separates a Scot from a sot?" asked Charles. The philosopher, with ready wit, retorted "the table." It must be added that the emperor had the good sense to smile.

² Hodgkin, *Charles the Great*, p. 190.

anything be more diplomatic than the manner in which Alcuin in later years conveys by letter the most delicate of hints to Charles that there was something wrong with the punctuation of the royal missives?¹

“Although the distinctions and sub-distinctions of punctuation give a fairer aspect to written sentences, yet from the rusticity of scribes their employment has almost disappeared. But even as the glory of all learning and the ornaments of wholesome erudition begin to be seen again by reason of your noble exertions, so also it seems most fitting that the use of punctuation should also be resumed by scribes. . . . Let your authority so instruct the youths at the Palace that they may be able to utter with perfect elegance whatsoever the clear eloquence of your thought may dictate, so that wherever the parchment bearing the Royal name shall go it may display the excellence of the Royal learning.”

Exactly how far the term “excellent” can be considered descriptive of the royal learning is a moot point, and depends upon the standard applied. Alcuin did his best with his pupils, and there have been few pupils of such supreme intelligence and with such a

¹ West's *Alcuin*, p. 71; Jaffé, *Ep.* 112.

stupendous thirst for knowledge as Charles. But the emperor was already in middle life when his academic studies began. His attendance at the Palace School must have been at best intermittent. Nevertheless, he understood Greek and Latin, he was at least interested in many and various sciences; even in that of medicine, though he was far too sagacious a man ever to permit the Court physicans to prescribe for his ailments. He, a great maker of history, loved to have read to him as he sat at meat the story of the past. It is true he could not write, though he made many attempts; but perhaps, as Mr. Mullinger suggests, it is not likely that fingers stiffened with the frequent "wielding of the good sword Joyeuse" would take kindly to the making of pot-hooks! It would appear that the Palace teaching, at least in so far as it concerned the adult pupils, was devoted rather to the stimulation of thought and to the pleasures of intellectual converse than to the acquirement of any very definite information. That this was so may be inferred from a dialogue written by Alcuin for the instruction of the young prince Pippin:

“What is grass?” asks Pippin—“The robe of the earth.” “What are vegetables?” —“The friends of the physician, the glory of the cooks.” “What is it renders bitter things sweet?”—“Hunger.” “What is that of which men never grow weary?”—“Gain.”

All this is ingenious and epigrammatic, no doubt, but that perhaps unduly discredited school-book, *Miss Mangnall's Questions*, would surely be of infinitely greater service for the advancement of knowledge. However this may be, there is abundant evidence that Alcuin's teaching was suited to his audience and stimulated their intellectual aspirations. Loving eulogies of the master remain, and deeds more convincing than words. Not only did he count among his friends almost all the great names of his time, but, before the day of his death, the conduct of the chief schools of Western Europe may be said to have passed into his pupils' hands. Not only at York and at Tours and at the Palace School, but at Orleans and Aniane, at Mainz and Trèves, at Salzburg and Fulda, from the centre to the outposts of the empire, thanks to the personal spell and contagious

enthusiasm of the man himself, the Alcuinian tradition was revered and maintained. But no individual effort, no personal magnetism, however great, could alone account for this sudden spread of learning. It was to Imperial legislation that learning was indebted for its opportunity and its advance.

“If only there were many who would follow the illustrious desire of your intent,” he wrote to Charles, “perhaps there might be founded in Frankland a new and more excellent Athens ennobled with the mastership of Christ the Lord.”¹ In the spirit of this exalted sentiment and with the highest conceivable aims, Charles and Alcuin framed their educational laws. As was natural, they addressed themselves in the first place to the clergy. By the Capitulary or Proclamation of 787, that “first general Charter of Education for the Middle Ages,” each great ecclesiastical dignity was furnished with a clear statement of the royal policy :

“We have judged it well”—so runs the document—“that in the bishoprics and monasteries committed by Christ’s favour to our

¹ *v. West’s Alcuin*, 48 ; Jaffé, *Ep.* 110.

charge, besides the due observance of a regular and holy life, care shall be had for the study of letters. . . . Those who seek to please God by living aright should not neglect to please Him by right speaking. . . . Though it is indeed better to do the right than to know it, yet it is needful also to know the right before we can do it. . . . But let the men chosen for this task be such as are both themselves able and willing to learn and eager withal to impart their learning to others . . . so that if any come to you to call upon the Divine Master or to behold the excellence of the religious life, they may be not only edified by your aspect but instructed by your wisdom."¹

Surely here there is no room for doubt though the voice is "the voice of Charles," that "the hand is the hand of Alcuin." This capitulary is the verbal expression of Alcuin's life-long beliefs and aspirations. It was confirmed by other and more far-reaching proclamations. By the Capitulary of 802 it was ordered that every one should send his son to school and should permit him to remain until he had become well instructed in learning. Undoubtedly it was the royal

¹ *v. Gaskoin's Alcuin, 182-4.*

intention that education should not only be universal but free, although no check was placed upon voluntary offerings. "Let the priests hold schools in towns and villages," writes Theodulph, the Bishop of Orleans, "and, if any of the faithful wish to entrust their children to them for the learning of letters, let them not refuse to receive and teach such children. Moreover, let them teach them from pure affection.... Let them exact no price save what their parents may offer voluntarily and from affection."¹

Thus, then, was framed an enlightened scheme of universal free education, and, though it cannot be described as compulsory, inasmuch as no legal penalties were attached to the neglect of the offered privilege, yet Charles took care that nobles and clergy, at any rate, should not with impunity disregard his wishes. Birth and rank did not ensure promotion: it was the reward of industry. "By the God of heaven I care nothing for your nobility," the king is said to have exclaimed to some lazy children, "but be sure of this: if you do not by vigilant zeal

¹ West's *Alcuin*, 55.

make up for your past neglect, you shall never get anything from Charles."

Then, too, the emperor did not hesitate to quicken the mental activity of the clergy by demanding from them a solution of his numerous theological difficulties—real or pretended. "What is the difference in meaning between 'perpetual' and 'immortal'?" "What is the sevenfold grace of the Holy Ghost?" "Why do we find in none of the gospels the hymn sung by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper?"—these are typical examples of a species of catechism which apparently was efficacious but must at the same time have been exceedingly galling. No doubt there were individual instances of evasion, witness the amusing story of a puzzled hunting prelate who persuaded the learned Theodulph of Orleans to send him a set of answers to the dreaded royal conundrums.¹ Moreover, it is not fair to disguise

¹ It is only in comparatively recent times that learning has become universal among bishops. Five hundred years after Charlemagne a Northumbrian bishop, Lewis, of Durham (1316-1333), was so ignorant of Latin that at his consecration, when he should have made his formal profession, he could not read it, "though he had

the fact that even in the eighth century free education did not commend itself to everybody. I suspect that the tale related by the monk of St. Gall reflects many another and unrecorded protest. Two Irishmen, he tells us, came over by chance into Gaul—"men profoundly versed in literature both sacred and profane." Traders they were not, but they went straight into the market-place crying out: "Ho! Does anyone want knowledge? Let him come to us and take it, for we have it *for sale*." "This they said because they observed how *the many care more for that which they pay for than for that which they get for nothing!*"

But the great and immediate results of Charles' legislation cannot be questioned. Not only was the standard of learning raised among the ranks of the nobles and clergy, but in every corner of the empire were

been instructed therein for many days beforehand; and having at last arrived with many promptings from others at the word 'metropolitan' which after many gasps he yet could not pronounce, at length he said in the French tongue 'Let that be taken as read!'" (From the chronicle of Robert de Graystones in Coulton's *Medieval Garner*.)

founded cathedral and monastic schools, and, in many dioceses, village schools, where elementary and more advanced knowledge was imparted without fee or charge, not only to youths who were destined for the Church but to the laity also. It was a scheme grandly conceived, and grandly administered so long as the guiding hand of the great emperor remained at the helm of State. And, although during the centuries of confusion which followed, all traces of the wider and more liberal plan of education would seem to have perished, yet the new learning was successfully planted within the convent walls. There it found a permanent home. The monastic schools remained, each of them an islet and refuge of civilisation amid the surging tides of barbarism. Here books were treasured and learning was kept alive. The Carolingian Renaissance, albeit partial and short-lived, did much to foster if it did not actually create that monastic zeal for letters which found expression in the familiar saying of a later day: "A cloister without a library is like a fortress without an armoury." Moreover, posterity has to thank these

monastic schools for something more than the mere passing on of a somewhat attenuated knowledge. Charles was a universal reformer, a sort of crowned Lord Brougham. No department of intellectual activity, whether law or theology or education, came amiss to him.¹ And in respect to each and all of them

¹ A few supplementary details upon the subject of these reforms may not be unacceptable to the student.

With Charles' encouragement, if not actually at his express command, Alcuin and his fellows achieved a great reform of written Latin. Alcuin "contended daily with the rusticity of Tours," and, by his crusade against incorrect spelling and against the introduction of Gallicisms, he brought back to the literary language something of the force and purity of the early centuries (Jaffé, *Ep.* 112). Then, too, there was attempted in an elementary way and with considerable lack of uniformity a scientific revision of classical and Biblical texts. The Alcuinian text of the Latin Bible, "corrupted indeed but never wholly losing its identity, lived on through the ceaseless changes of many centuries and, in the modern recension of the Vulgate, is living still" (*v.* Gaskoin, 243).

Alcuin is in large measure responsible for that wise and broad-minded compromise between Gallic and Roman tradition which resulted in the production of the Carolingian Missal, which "became and has to this day continued the great official prayer-book of the Western Church."

I will not enter upon the difficult subject of the theological controversies of Alcuin's day, passionate

—in the crusade against bad spelling as in the dispute with Spanish heretics, in the

though they were, and landmarks in the history of thought. The great scholar, as champion of Roman universalism and ecclesiastical tradition, ran fierce tilts against Spanish bishops like the saintly Felix of Urgel, who presumed to dispute the teaching of the Fathers.

Music and singing were not neglected. Alcuin, like Bede, appears to have possessed much knowledge of music and very definite views upon the thorny subject of singing in church. He composed secular songs, both words and tune, for the uses of the army. Not that he can be described in any sense as a Tyrtoeus, for in compliance with the curious but express request of Charles, the songs were designed above all things to produce an effect both "peaceful and soothing."

It cannot be affirmed with absolute certainty that the efforts of Charles and Alcuin towards a reform of church music were attended by the success deserved.

The ostensible object was uniformity, and uniformity in accordance with the Roman style.

If we are to believe John the Deacon (*Life of Gregory the Great*), church music in Frankland was in a parlous state indeed when first Charles took in hand its reform. John declares that when the Germans or Gauls tried to give expression to the "delicate modulations" of the Gregorian chant their "barbarous and bibulous throats produced a rattle like wagons crashing down steps, so that the feelings of the congregation were rasped and stunned instead of being soothed." But the same writer freely admits that the "cantors sent from Rome at the King's request laboured not unfruitfully at Metz"—"in

framing of an official prayer-book as in the regulation of music and singing, Charles looked with reason upon Alcuin as his right-hand man.

Such then, in brief, was the scope and character of the work accomplished by the scholar. It remains to speak of the counsellor and politician.

Curiously enough, recent English writers, with the notable exception of Dr. Hodgkin (and perhaps, I may add, Dr. Browne) lay little stress on this phase of Alcuin's life save in so far as it has reference to matters strictly educational. But neither M. Monnier nor M. Guizot, statesman himself, are under any illusion as to its immense and far-reaching import.

proportion as the Roman chant surpassed that of Metz, so the chant of Metz surpassed that of the other schools of the French."

But Alcuin, like Gregory himself, paid much more regard in this matter to the expression of a reverent spirit than to the attainment of artistic perfection. "Let the clergy chant with moderated voice striving to please God rather than men. An immoderate exaltation of voice is a sign of boastfulness" (Jaffé, *Ep.* 72). On the general subject of the Gregorian chant *v.* Dudden's *Gregory the Great*, i. 271-6.

The nature of the letters exchanged between Charles and the Abbot of St. Martin's enables us to infer with certainty that, when resident at Court, Alcuin was the constant and in all probability the most trusted sharer of the royal mind and counsel. Perhaps the office of schoolmaster was never more exalted than in his person. It is not likely that more than a small fraction of the Alcuinian correspondence remains. Yet the reader cannot fail to be struck with the great variety of topics upon which Charles consults his absent friend. These include, as a matter of course, many points of scholarship and of dogma in regard to which Alcuin does his best to satisfy the emperor's insatiable curiosity. Then there are letters of a more intimate personal character, in which the sympathetic regard felt by a great gentleman for his friend, who happens also to be the mightiest monarch on earth, finds expression in terms, not of slavish dependence, but of the purest affection and goodwill. They are models of what such letters should be, and reflect the highest credit alike upon the man who wrote them and upon the man to whom

they were sent. Take, for example, the epistle of condolence on the death of Queen Liutgarde. It reminds one of Bossuet at his best :

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, our safety, our consolation has, with His gentle voice, commanded all who groan, being burdened, to come to Him, saying ‘Come unto Me all you that labour and I will give you rest.’ What can be more sweet than this promise? What more blessed than this hope?”¹

Or, again, when Alcuin urges Charles to avoid the dangers attendant upon an Italian expedition :

“Though my affection may appear insensate, at least it cannot be charged with want of consistency, and the confidence I have in your proved humility emboldens me to say to you what I do. . . . Your prosperity, I declare to you, is more to me than my own life. You are the blessing of the kingdom, the safety of the people, the honour of the Church, the protector of all the faithful in Christ. . . . It is therefore just and necessary that, with an attentive spirit and a devoted heart, we occupy ourselves with your

¹ Jaffé, *Ep.* 138.

fortune and your health, and pray God to preserve to us in health and prosperity our most excellent King David."¹

But beyond all else, these letters give proof of the respect paid by Charles to his friend's judgment upon matters of high politics. The singularly frank, though at the same time perfectly respectful tenour of Alcuin's replies, no less than the wisdom of his advice, bespeaks long familiarity with State affairs. Genuine insight, which showed itself in a most judicious mingling of daring and prudence, broadmindedness, mercy—all these qualities are abundantly displayed in this important series of letters, one of the most precious literary relics of the early Middle Ages. When Alcuin advised the emperor with respect to the treatment of the conquered Saxons, no Gregory the Great could have shown a more sympathetic tolerance, and when in the same letter—that famous, perhaps epoch-making letter of May, 799—he urges Charles to visit Rome and solve in person the perilous and difficult problems of that most critical hour, no Hildebrand or Napoleon

¹ Guizot, *History of Civilization*, ii. 245-6 ; Jaffé, *Ep.* 156.

could have contemplated with more apparent equanimity the enormous political changes which he must have anticipated as the certain result of the adoption of his advice. For consider the circumstances: the Roman Empire, now confined, so far as Europe was concerned, to the Balkan Peninsula, was ruled from Constantinople by a woman, the Empress Irene. Ambitious, devoid of scruple or of pity, she had just deposed her son and caused him to be blinded with every circumstance of brutality. The event sent a thrill of horror through the Eastern world. Moreover, Irene's subjects objected to female rule—"God forbid that the polity of the Romans should come to such a plight as that" was the cry of a seventh century Byzantine mob. While the second Rome bowed with sullen submission beneath the sceptre of a woman who was at the time supposed to be the murderess of her son, the state of affairs in the ancient capital was little more satisfactory. As the power of the empire waned, its hold on Italy grew less and less. The championship of Roman civilisation in the Italian peninsula gradually devolved upon the Bishop

of Rome, and, not many years before Charles' accession, the Pope had assumed, with the concurrence of his powerful protector, the King of the Franks,¹ the actual dignity of temporal sovereign over that part of Central Italy which had been saved from the Lombard invader. But the turbulent citizens of Rome were from the first inclined to dispute the authority of their erstwhile protector, now their prince. One hundred and fifty times during the Middle Ages they rose against their priestly lord.

It was one incident in this long story of civic disorder that was the direct occasion of Charles' memorable Italian journey of the year 800. Leo III., the reigning pontiff, was set upon and beaten in the streets of Rome, and driven to seek refuge amid the mountains of Umbria.² These were events of the

¹ Dr. Hodgkin, in the course of a comment which he has been good enough to make upon the statement in the text, remarks that he is "not quite sure that we can say that the Pope assumed with Pippin's consent the actual dignity of temporal sovereign over Central Italy," and adds that "it is very difficult to affirm or deny anything about the donation of Pippin."

² The Pope's assailants seem to have been either

month of April, 798, and in May of 799 Alcuin, in reply to a communication from his august master, wrote the famous letter to which I have alluded :

“ To his peace-making Lord, King David, Albinus wishes health. I thank your goodness, sweetest David, for remembering my littleness and making me acquainted with the facts which your faithful servant has brought to my ears. Were I present with you, I should have many counsels to offer to your Dignity, if you had opportunity to listen or I eloquence to speak. For I love to write concerning your prosperity, the stability of the Kingdom given you by God and the advancement of the Holy Church of Christ. All which are much troubled and stained by the daring deeds of wicked men which have been perpetrated, not on obscure and ignoble persons, but on the greatest and the highest.

“ For there have been hitherto three persons higher than all the others in this world. One is the Apostolic Sublimity who rules by vicarious power from the seat of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles. And what

unskilled or half-hearted. They tried to put out his eyes, but with singular ill-success, for we have the testimony of the monk of St. Gall that, after a period of rest, the Pontiff's new eyes were better than his old ones both for use and to look at !

has been done to him, who was the ruler of the aforesaid see, you have in your goodness informed me.

“The second is the Imperial dignity and power of the second Rome. How impiously the Governor of that Empire (Constantine VI.) has been deposed, not by aliens but by his own people and fellow citizens, universal rumour tells us.

“The third is the royal dignity in which the decree of our Lord Jesus Christ has placed you as ruler of the Christian people, more excellent in power than the other aforesaid dignities, more illustrious in wisdom, more sublime in the dignity of your Kingdom. Lo! now on you alone the salvation of the Churches of Christ falls and rests. You are the avenger of crimes, the guide of the wanderers, the comforter of the mourners, the exalter of the good.”¹

Events moved rapidly. Two months later Leo met Charles at Paderborn. The pope sought protection at the only source from which it could be obtained. Charles, already predisposed to interfere, gave a favourable response to this appeal and despatched Leo to Rome under the protection of Frankish commissioners.

¹ v. Hodgkin's *Charles the Great*, 191-2; Jaffé, *Ep.* 114

The spring of 800 saw the king at Tours in close consultation with his friend. In August he turned his steps towards Italy, and November found him in Rome.

Here he quieted the surging populace, and, 800
before the tomb of St. Peter, on that fateful Christmas day, he received from the hands of the pope the golden crown and the purple mantle of empire.

To us in these days it seems as if all external events, good and evil alike, together with the thoughts of reflecting men and the new educational movement, with its appeal to the glories of a bye-gone imperialism, and its memories of the Roman Peace, had long been pointing to the inevitable consummation. In the East a discredited representative of the ancient Caesars sat on her tottering throne ; in the West the head of Latin Christianity stood in need of a protector with that indisputable right to intervene which the Imperial dignity alone could confer. It was high time that name and reality should be made to correspond, that the man upon whose shoulders the burden of civilisation rested should assume that august title which was

the traditional and historic symbol of order and of law.

It is asserted by Einhard that the chief actor in this great ceremonial played an unexpected and reluctant part.

If this were so, it was surely the manner rather than the fact of the ceremony which occasioned the royal misgivings. Perhaps already Charles foresaw something of the dangers which lurked behind the bestowal of the crown at the hands of the pope,—the clash of rival claims for the headship of the world, the centuries of blood-stained strife. But it is well-nigh impossible to believe that a man so keen-sighted and strong-willed would have accepted the Imperial crown if he had not desired it. Many and various were the motives which had long united to urge him forward. The pressure of external events and the counsel of his friends would find a strong ally in the promptings of personal ambition. His was that "intense and restless genius" which, as Mr. Bryce finely says, "be it never so unselfish in its ends... must raise out of everything its monument."

"It is a chaste ambition to have as much

power as may be that there may be the more power to do good in the place where a man lives"—such was the exclamation of our own Lord Strafford in his eloquent and pathetic apologia, and it is a sentiment which might well have fallen, at least in his later years, from the lips of Charles himself. Here again, and never with more certainty than in this last and most admirable phase of the emperor's life, we may trace the influence of his friend. If, as his reign advanced, self-aggrandisement lost its charm, and personal interests became merged in the public good, much of the credit must be given to Alcuin.

The letter from which I last quoted illustrates more conspicuously than any other surviving document his true position in the royal counsels, his perhaps unequalled influence upon Imperial policy. But it does more than this. It emphasises as no other written word of his, a side of Alcuin's character which cannot be too highly praised: I mean his ever-present profound conviction that the greater the power the greater is the obligation it entails. He fails not in the

plainest terms to remind Charles of the duties and high privileges of his exalted station.

St. Simon tells us, in his fascinating *Memoirs*, how delighted he was and at the same time how startled and terrified by a remark made by the Duke of Burgundy during the height of the old régime. The duke had the audacity publicly to declare his opinion that kings existed for the good of the people, and not the people for the good of kings. None but a royal prince would have dared to utter so revolutionary a sentiment. Such was the attitude of the Court of France nine hundred years after Alcuin's day. He was, indeed, in advance of his time. Nor is this to be wondered at. He was a scholar ; and not only the Bible, but the literature of Greece and Rome would furnish him with many examples of rulers who devoted themselves body and soul to the welfare of their peoples.

But he was more than a scholar, he was a Northumbrian ; and no countryman of Edwin, Oswald and Oswy need trouble to consult either the heathen classics or the Christian scriptures in search of a patriot king.

Even the mighty Charles, bowed with the burden of half Europe, must often have needed a sustaining hand. Although the brazen eagle on the palace roof might not veer and shift, as the superstitious said it did, pointing always to the place of danger or of need ; yet the very tradition serves to reveal the amazement of contemporaries at the wonderful results of an unresting energy and unsleeping eye. But no one man, whether a Charles, a Caesar or a Napoleon, can perform such tasks unaided. The emperor might well have despaired of his interminable work ; his mission, high and noble as it was, might well have degenerated into a ruthless and insatiable lust of conquest had there not been ever at his side during the most critical period of his life a friend and counsellor who lost no opportunity of impressing upon the mind of his sovereign the sacred obligations and responsibilities of power. Continuously for twenty years Alcuin held up before his master's eyes as the model and goal of Imperial aspiration a new and Christian ideal of civic order,—the image of a city more glorious than Aachen, which might perpetuate

the memory of the founder and contribute to the welfare of mankind when all the fleeting splendour of his most successful wars had long since grown pale and dim. This, perhaps, was the highest duty which it was within the power of any private individual then on earth to fulfil, and right faithfully did Alcuin fulfil it.

Here, then, must end this short review of two noble lives. What I have said has been sufficient to vindicate the services of Northumbria to the cause of European learning. Her sons during the darkest hour were its champions and standard-bearers. Benedict of Wearmouth, Bede of Jarrow, Egbert, Albert, and Alcuin of York, each in turn upheld the banner. Amidst the wreck of empire the pupils and friends of Alcuin and the schools which he had founded passed on the tradition of his teaching from one generation to another. And, although it is necessary to assign definite limits to the Anglo-Saxon sphere of influence, and to admit that the universities of Europe trace their origin to other and remoter sources than the shores of Britain, yet for this new development the ecclesiastical schools prepared the way. They

were instruments ready to the hand of the later teachers. In a very true sense it may be said that modern scholarship was reared upon the foundation of the age of Charles. Lacking as they were in prescience, narrow as was their intellectual horizon, the genealogy of learning must for ever be incomplete without the names of the Northumbrian scholars.

Modern Northumbria has produced many men distinguished in the fields of politics, of religion and of learning. It has not infrequently displayed something of its old-time intellectual and moral supremacy. In the merits and defects which inevitably accompany an intense local patriotism it is surpassed by no district in England, but its pre-eminence to-day is beyond all else commercial and material. He who runs may read it; it speaks in terms of hundreds of millions of pounds! The rush and struggle of existence has left to most of us little time or inclination to appreciate remote ages and the glories that are gone. We are too apt to ignore and despise ideals that differ so

entirely from our own, but it may well be open to doubt whether in things fundamental and eternal, which cannot be numbered by figures or expressed by formulae, the Northumbria of 1200 years ago which manufactured great rulers and saints and exported great missionaries and great scholars, was not to the full as rich and prolific as its twentieth century successor, and this in spite of all the looms of Yorkshire, all the mines of Durham and all the shipping of the Tyne.



CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE.

- 590-604.—Pontificate of Gregory the Great.
597.—Augustine lands in England.
Columba dies at Iona.
- 593-617.—Ethelfrid King of Northumbria.
613.—Ethelfrid defeats the Welsh at Chester.
617.—Ethelfrid is defeated and killed in battle against
Redwald and Edwin at the river Idle.
- 617-633.—The reign of Edwin.
626.—Edwin and his Witan accept Christianity.
633.—Penda and Cadwallon victorious at Hatfield,
where Edwin is slain.
Birth of Wilfrid.
- 634-642.—The reign of Oswald.
634.—Battle of Heavenfield.
635.—Aidan comes to Lindisfarne.
637.—Birth of Cuthbert.
642.—Battle of Maserfield ; Oswald defeated by Penda
and slain.
- 644-671.—The reign of Oswy.
655.—Battle of Winwidfield ; Penda defeated and
slain.
664.—The Synod of Whitby.
668.—Theodore of Tarsus consecrated Archbishop of
Canterbury.

- 669-678.—Wilfrid Bishop of York.
 671-685.—The reign of Egfrid.
 673.—Birth of Bede.
 678.—Wilfrid's diocese divided; his first appeal to Rome.
 681.—The beginning of Wilfrid's mission in Sussex.
 685.—Cuthbert Bishop of Lindisfarne.
 Egfrid defeated and slain at Nechstanmere.
 687.—Death of Cuthbert.
 690.—Death of Theodore.
 705.—The Council by the Nidd; a final settlement of Wilfrid's disputes.
 709.—Death of Wilfrid.
 735.—Death of Bede.
 Birth of Alcuin.
 742.—Birth of Charlemagne (Charles the Great).
 c. 745-782.—Alcuin a scholar and master at York.
 781.—Alcuin meets Charles at Parma.
 782-796.—Alcuin master of the palace school at Aachen and "minister of education."
 796-804.—Alcuin Abbot of Tours.
 800.—Charles crowned Emperor in St. Peter's.
 804.—Death of Alcuin.

GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE NORTHUMBRIAN KINGS

BERNICIA

IDA

ETHELRIC

(1) Bebb = **ETHELFRID**
(593-617)

Ebba, **OSWALD** (1) Riemmelth = **OSWY** = (2) Eanflod
Abbess of (634-642)
Coldingham. = Cyneburga.

ETHELWALD,
King of Deira
(died c. 655).

EGFRID
(671-685)
= (1) Etheldreda,
afterwards Abbess
of Ely
= (2) Ermenburga.

ALCHFRID,
King of Deira
(died c. 664)
= Cyneburga,
dr. of Penda,
King of Mercia.

Alchfleda
= Peadra,
son of Penda,
King of Mercia.

Elfleda,
Abbess of
Whitby.

Hild,
Abbess of
Whitby.

DEIRA

Yffi

ELLA

Elfric

EDWIN (617-633)
= (2) Ethelburga,
dr. of Ethelbert, King of Kent.

Unnamed

Hereric

OSWIN
(644-651)

OSRIC
(633-634)

SOME BOOKS LIKELY TO BE USEFUL TO THE GENERAL READER.

GENERAL.

BRIGHT, "Chapters of Early English Church History"
(Clarendon Press).

GREEN, "The Making of England" (Macmillan).

HODGKIN (DR. THOMAS), "The History of England from
the Earliest Times to the Norman Conquest"
(Longmans).

MONTALEMBERT, "Monks of the West," vols. ii., iii. and iv.
(Nimmo).

OMAN (CHARLES), "England Before the Norman Conquest"
(Methuen).

LECTURE I.

BEDE, "Historia Ecclesiastica," edited by Plummer (Clarendon Press).

Also a translation in Bohn's series (Bell).

BROWNE (DR. G. F.), (Bishop of Bristol)—

"The Church in these Islands before Augustine"
(S.P.C.K.).

"Augustine and his Companions" (S.P.C.K.).

"The Conversion of the Heptarchy" (S.P.C.K.).

DUDDEN (F. H.), "Gregory the Great" (Longmans).

MURRAY'S "Handbook for Durham and Northumberland" (Stanford).

"Six Old English Chronicles" (including Gildas and Nennius) trans. in Bohn's series (Bell).

LECTURE II.

BEDE, "Ecclesiastical History" and "Life of Cuthbert."

BROWNE (DR. G. F.), "Theodore and Wilfrith" (S.P.C.K.).

EYRE, "Life of Cuthbert" (Burns & Oates).

LIGHTFOOT, "Leaders in the Northern Church" (Macmillan).

"The Church Historians of England—Simeon of Durham" (Seeley & Co.).

"The Diocesan Histories—Durham," by Low (S.P.C.K.).

LECTURE III.

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